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Wanderlust

SPECIAL ISSUE

**Celebrating 20
Years in Travel**

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20
TRAVEL
EXPERIENCES
TO CHANGE
YOUR LIFE



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just get it...*

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On 22 November 1993, around 2,000 copies of a rather skinny new magazine called *Wanderlust* dropped on people's doormats.

The idea for the magazine had been dreamt up a year earlier on a flight to Ecuador. That had certainly been a life-changing trip for myself and my husband, Paul Morrison. It therefore seemed appropriate that in this 20th anniversary edition, we should celebrate those travel experiences that have the power to transform your life.

We had to include Ecuador (p116), so we have a piece on the newly reopened rail line that we featured back in Issue 1. Meanwhile, editor Phoebe Smith went in search of the world's largest mammal (p100) and Paul Bloomfield had an insight into Bhutan's culture (p30).

I went off to Namibia (p46). Has it changed my life? Well, yes, it probably has. I met people who had a profound effect on me, and I had my beliefs on how conservation best works challenged and overturned. But, that, after all is the joy of travel.

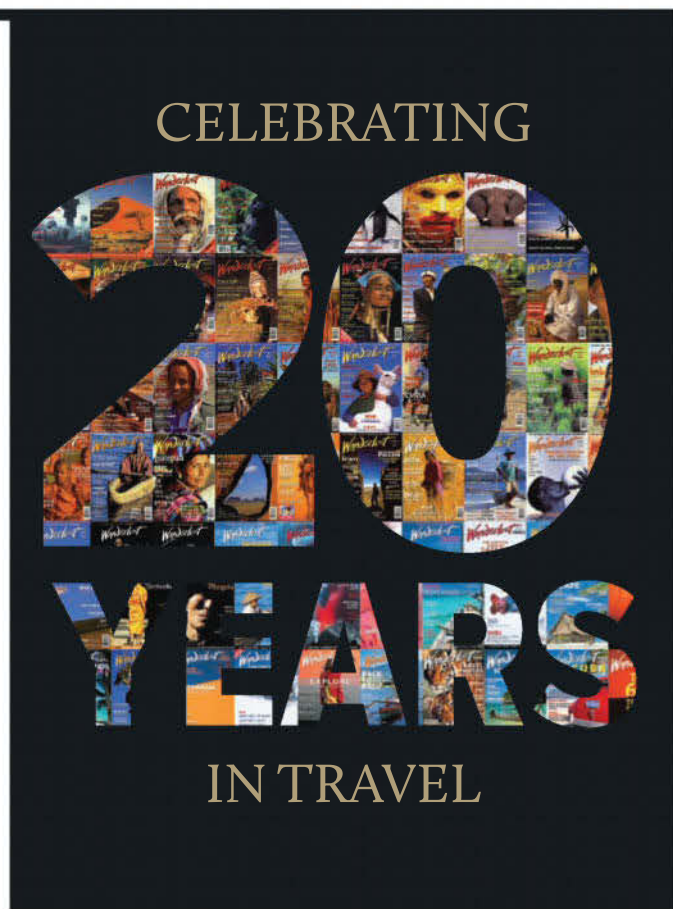
We still have many loyal readers (and trade partners) from our very first issue, so a special thank you to them. And I hope we have helped change the lives of *all* our readers over the years.

Here's to the next 20 years of travel for us all!

Lyn

LYN HUGHES

Editor-In-Chief/Co-founder



THE TEAM

This issue we asked the team where they were travelling 20 years ago?



PHOEBE SMITH
♦ EDITOR ♦

I'd just been to **Paris** with my granny – my first overseas trip (due to my mum's fear of flying). She was my idol, having just returned from a round the world trip – I swore I would follow in her foot steps and guess what...



GRAHAM BERRIDGE
♦ ART DIRECTOR ♦

20 years ago I was exploring the beautiful beaches of **North Cornwall** in search of the best surf. It was a delight to return this year to the same bays in order to let my son experience the very same beaches.



SARAH BAXTER
♦ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ♦

Er, **Florida**. I met the locals (Mickey! Minnie!), sampled native cuisine (burgers/fries/pancakes) and contributed to the economy ("Is that one Hard Rock shirt you'd like? Or two?"). Life-changing? Maybe not. Fun? Hell yeah!



TOM HAWKER
♦ PRODUCTION EDITOR ♦

On a school skiing trip to **Austria**, desperately trying to sneak the local firewater past the teachers and attempting – with a great deal less success – to get off with the girls. On the plus side, the Alps look nice.



MIKE WRIGHT
♦ ART EDITOR ♦

I was also skiing in **Austria**, and one night we all went sledging fuelled up with the local schnapps on a moonlight trail run. I ended up getting air and then buried, when wiped out on a fast turn – wunderbar!



ALEXANDRA GREGG
♦ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ♦

I was on holiday in **Heraklion, Crete**. Being only four at the time I don't recall much, but my sister tells me I was most excited about my first plane journey – which I slept all the way through. Whoops!



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See p26 for details

Wanderlust

For people with a passion for travel

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In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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This issue was brought to you in part by....



FRANCIS LAPOINTE

Captain for AML whalewatching, Québec

This issue Francis took us out on the water to see the biggest mammal on earth under the waves (p100)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle ... which are you?

Ocean, of course!

What was your first great travel experience?

Scotland... It was the place where I learnt to be proud of the country that we come from.

What has been your favourite journey?

When I finished my PhD!

Which are your top five places worldwide?

For the top five, I can't make an order but...

France: for the culture, food, and, of course, the wine; Australia for the spirit of ocean; California – West is always the best! Italia, as every man has his romantic side! And the Îles de la Madeleine, for the beauty of the Saint Lawrence river.

Which passport stamp are you proudest of?

French Polynesia: the incarnation of paradise...

Which passport stamp would you like to have?

Argentina: go à la Terre De Feu and touch the Antarctic

Where or what is your guilty travel pleasure?

Florida: I love baseball and the beach!



LEO HOULDING

British adventurer and climber

On page 8, we see breathtaking photos from Leo's latest expedition and hear him talk adventure

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle ... which are you?

Mountain obviously, but I do like a contrast.

What was your first great travel experience?

I went with my parents to Marrakech when I was three. I lost them in the souks. My mum was frantic but I turned up hanging around with a guy with some snakes.

What has been your favourite journey?

Putting up a new climbing route on El Cap in Yosemite. It took ten years so it was a physical journey up a massive cliff but a journey through life too.

Which are your top five places worldwide?

Yosemite NP; Lake District; Ulvetanna in Antarctica; Sumba, Indonesia (for surfing) and London.

Which passport stamp are you proudest of?

Antarctica – though they don't actually stamp it.

Which passport stamp would you like to have?

Loads – but at the moment Pakistan for the Karakoram.

Where or what is your guilty travel pleasure?

Coffee – real coffee.



HRH PRINCESS UBOLRATANA OF THAILAND

The Tourism Ambassador of Thailand gives out awards to the winners of Thailand Green Excellence Awards (p21)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Ocean. It's open and nice and I used to sail.

What was your first great travel experience?

I've been to Venice three times and had happy experiences, taking my children on a gondola, and my son [who died in the 2004 tsunami] – when I was with him I was happy.

What has been your favourite journey?

The most memorable was a boat journey in a nature reserve. I prefer plane journeys so as to reach my destination quicker.

Which are your top five places worldwide?

The United States is a top place, England, Italy, Japan, Hong Kong.

Which passport stamp would you like to have?

I've never been to South America, so maybe I'd go to Brazil for the next World Cup!

Guilty pleasure?

I work very hard but I love to travel.

For fuller interviews – and details of the Awards – see wanderlust.co.uk/142

Wanderlust Mission Statement

Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual Awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.



Official partner of the FCO's Know Before You Go Campaign





Explore exotic Oman. The best of both worlds.

Oman is able to offer people a unique combination of stunning marine life and undiscovered beauty. There are rugged mountain ranges and sweeping deserts. Pristine white beaches and a coastline covered in coral reefs where you'll find turtles, rays, sharks, eels and a rainbow of mesmerising reef fish. When it comes to accommodation, there is everything from rustic beachside chalets to world-class 5-star resorts. If you're looking for an unforgettable holiday, put Oman at the top of your list. It really is the best of both worlds.



Beauty has an address

For more information on Oman please contact:

Oman Ministry of Tourism UK & Ireland Representative Office

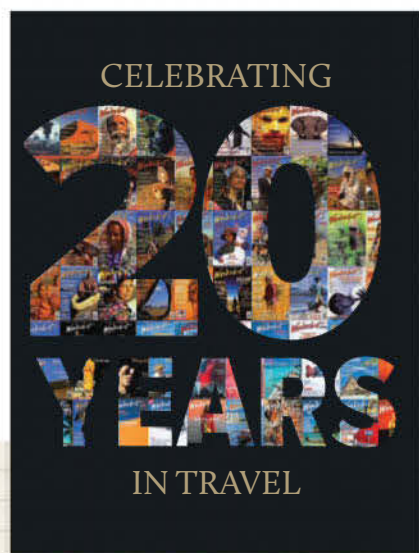
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Ministry of Tourism

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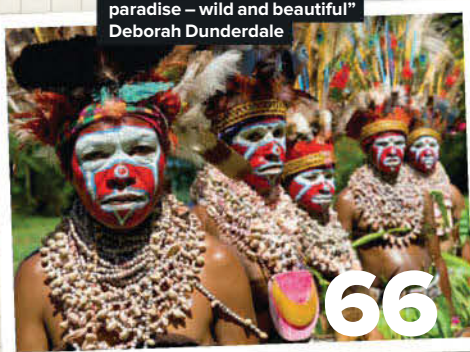
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WIN!
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"Papua New Guinea is an untamed paradise – wild and beautiful!"
Deborah Dunderdale

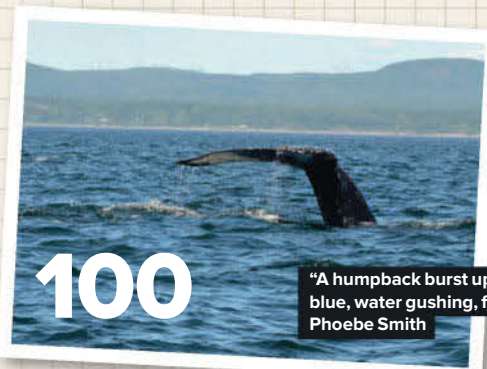


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"A humpback burst up from the blue, water gushing, fins splayed"
Phoebe Smith

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360°

V i e w f i n d e r



SNOW MONKEY

Jigokudani Valley, Japan

Photographer: **David Yarrow**

"The monkeys are in the mountains near Shibu Onsen, which is only an hour from the Olympic city of Nagano, itself just two hours by bullet train from Tokyo. Those looking for a fresh experience can leave Europe at midday and be walking in the serenity of the mountain forests by 3pm Japanese time the next day. By definition, the snow monkeys should only be photographed in the snow. January and February are the best times – the temperatures are well below zero and the snow monkeys are drawn to the warmth of the hot springs."

David Yarrow's Encounter
(Clearview, £60) is out now;

www.davidyarrowphotography.com





FINAL FRONTIER? Ulvetanna, Antarctica

Photographer: **Alastair Lee**

At the end of 2012, British adventurer and climber Leo Houlding headed to Queen Maud Land in Antarctica to tackle the north-east ridge of a mountain called Ulvetanna – Norwegian for 'the Wolf's Tooth' (pictured). Award-winning filmmaker Al Lee was there to capture his success on camera in his new film *The Last Great Climb*. But is it really the last? Are there other adventures out there for us to dream about?

"Yes," says Leo, "to those with a creative drive, they are endless. Nature provides the set, the ambition of your imagination creates the scene. I prefer to think of it as 'the last great climb... before the next' – which I'm already planning, to another equally spectacular, but drastically more remote monolith in another part of Antarctica."

So how easy was it to shoot in the extremes of the White Continent? "The main difficulty was dealing with how bright it was," says Al. "When you looked into the camera it took a while for your eyes to adjust. I'm pretty well trained at shooting in the cold being based in Lancashire. You've just got to be ready to work hard."

The Last Great Climb is available now from www.posingproductions.com





THE CAULDRON Kamchatka, Russia

Photographer: **Sergey Gorshkov**

Capturing the perfect moment on camera can take time – as photographer Sergey Gorshkov knows all too well: getting this shot took him seven years.

“On 29 November 2012, I finally got a call to say Plosky Tolbachik volcano was erupting. I immediately set off,” says Sergey. “After flying around by helicopter I decided to stay nearby for a night. We put up the tents 300m from the crater and, that night, I took the shot. Looking at it reminds me of the explosion and heat from the boiling lava. It deeply impressed me.”

‘The Cauldron’ won the Wildscapes category in Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013. www.nhm.ac.uk

■ Readers' Pictures

YOUR PHOTOS

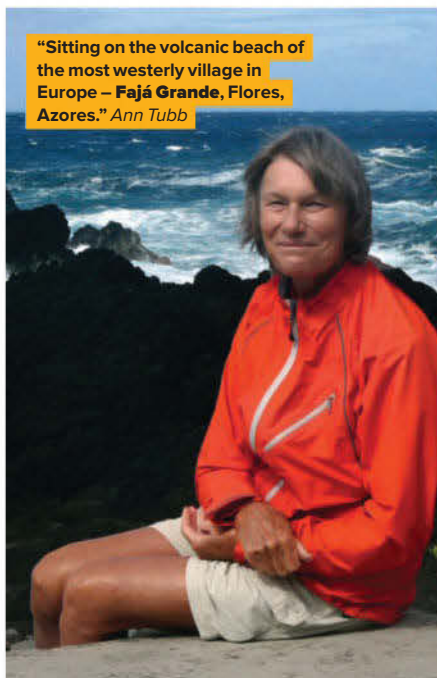
Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?
Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk & make us jealous!



"Climbing up **Helvellyn**, Lake District."
Millie Williams



"Preparing to take a balloon flight over **Cappadocia**, Turkey." *Lisa Cavazos*



"Sitting on the volcanic beach of the most westerly village in Europe – **Fajá Grande**, Flores, Azores." *Ann Tubb*



"Washing and playing with elephants at the Elephant Village near **Luang Prabang**, Laos." *Simonne Watts*



"I got my copy of *Wanderlust* the morning I was flying out, so I took it with me to Georgia. This shot is of the UNESCO-listed site of **Ushguli** in Svaneti, the highest inhabited settlement in Europe."

Matthew Morris

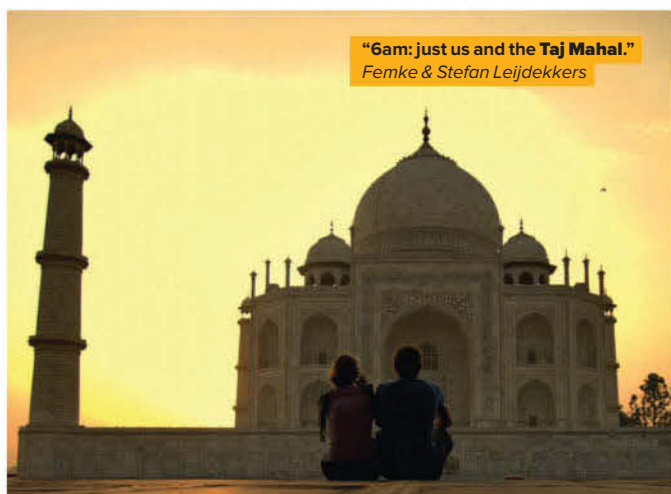
Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **Polar Buff®** – the ultimate travel accessory (RRP £23). But can you do better than Matthew (above)? We want to see where your *Wanderlust* takes you and where you take your *Wanderlust*!

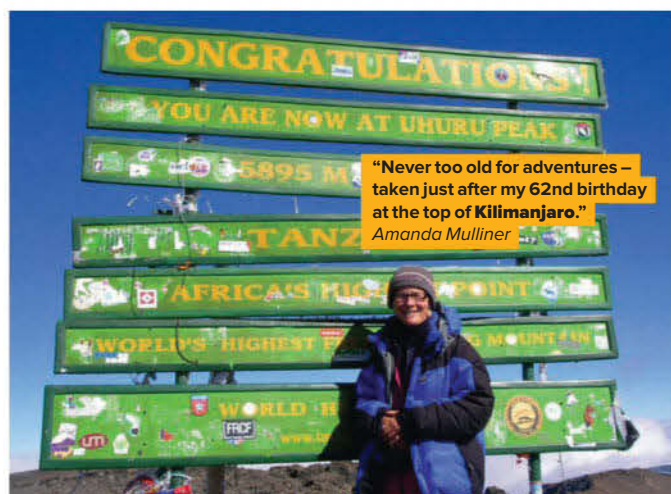
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THE ORIGINAL
MULTIFUNCTIONAL
HEADWEAR
Since 1988



"6am: just us and the **Taj Mahal**."
Femke & Stefan Leijdekkers



"Never too old for adventures – taken just after my 62nd birthday at the top of **Kilimanjaro**."
Amanda Mulliner

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your winter essentials: from the hottest new destinations, to Sir Ranulph Fiennes' top cold tips, tasty tagines, huskies & more

■ New beginnings

South Sudan should be on your wishlist

The first guidebook to the world's newest country has given us itchy feet

Bradt, the Captain Kirk of travel publishing, which dares go where others fear to print, has released the first guidebook to South Sudan and we're officially intrigued.

The guide, out now, lifts the lid on the world's newest country. South Sudan only became a nation in July 2011 on gaining independence from Sudan, following decades of civil war. It's one of just a handful of countries to be younger than *Wanderlust*!

"South Sudan is exciting because it's so unexplored," says one of the guidebook's authors Sophie

Lovell-Hoare. "Even before independence it was virtually out of bounds due to war

and, before that, its geography. This is the first time in history that tourists have been able to visit South Sudan."

So what allure does the country hold for the traveller, beyond bragging rights? Meet the people, recommends Sophie: "Experience the excitement of Bor wrestling in Freedom Square and visit the Dinka cattle camps to see the traditional herders' way of life."

Other highlights include Mount Kinyeti and the Imatong Mountains ("a wilderness

where you can feel like a bona fide 19th-century explorer") and the herds of elephants, giraffes and gazelles in the national parks: "maybe even now a few white rhino survive in the uncharted wilds of western South Sudan," Sophie adds.

The infrastructure is rudimentary. "There are few paved roads, and travelling can take longer than expected," says Jim Louth, MD of Undiscovered Destinations, which is running the first group trip to South Sudan in January. "The authorities are unused to tourists, so delays are likely while the tour

leader explains. Rules may be interpreted differently, with no discernible logic.

As well as patience, travellers must bring a sense of humour!"

A prime example is the enforcing of a system of photography permits, required by anyone wanting to take pics in South Sudan. "We've been advised that this will cost \$50 a day," Jim explains. "We hope this will reduce, but it may not. And we cannot say how strictly it will be enforced – if at all."

For those who reckon that, in the past 20 years, travel has gone soft, South Sudan may well be the adventurer's antidote.

'South Sudan is exciting because it's so unexplored'





Expert Views

How safe is travel to South Sudan?



The Foreign & Commonwealth Office currently advises against all travel to within

40km of South Sudan's border with Sudan and against all but essential travel to Jonglei State, in the east.

Undiscovered Destinations, which is running the first group tour to South Sudan in January, says there is the possibility of being detained by officials – the country is entirely unused to tourists. But travel journalist Mark Stratton is unperturbed: “There are some border issues, but I’m going on the first tour [for *Wanderlust!*] with an experienced operator, and well away from such areas.”

Fact File

20 YEARS: Countries lost & gained

LOST

- ◆ **Czechoslovakia** (dissolved Jan 1993)
- ◆ **Yugoslavia** (after long period of instability, it fully dissolved in 2006 following the split of Serbia and Montenegro)
- ◆ **Zaire** (changed name to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997)

GAINED

- ◆ **Czech Republic** (Jan 1993)
- ◆ **Slovakia** (Jan 1993)
- ◆ **Eritrea** (independence from Ethiopia in May 1993)
- ◆ **Palau** (1994; formerly part of the Trust Territory of Pacific Islands, administered by the United States)
- ◆ **East Timor/Timor-Leste** (2002)
- ◆ **Montenegro** (2006)
- ◆ **Serbia** (2006)
- ◆ **Kosovo** (2008)
- ◆ **South Sudan** (2011)

New Routes

GO NOW...

Historic heights

The observation deck of Astana's Baiterek Tower is 97m up, to recall the city's year of creation – 1997



New flights to Kazakh capital

Why go?

New direct flights from Heathrow to Astana are making journeys to the Central Asian country a breeze.

On arrival, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the clashing shapes and colours shooting up from the steppe were a mirage. But no, it is the capital. Created in 1997 when the government decided to shift to the northern province of Akmola, Astana's skyline is testament to its youth, an eclectic architectural gallery.

The Ishim River divides the city. The Left Bank is home to the new government buildings; the more relaxed Right Bank (Old Town) is a mix of modern, Soviet and Tsarist styles. Respublika Avenue is the main hub, lined with cafés.

Take a stroll past the Presidential Cultural Centre, visit the Museum of Modern Art and play a game of giant chess in the Central Square. If you fly in before New Year, you'll be in time to see the annual Ice

Town, an illuminated display of snowy sculptures.



Where to stay?

The luxurious Rixos President Hotel (rixosastana.com) is located near the unmissable 105m-high Baiterek Tower on the town's Left Bank. Doubles from US\$238 (£150) pn.



Get there now!

Air Astana (airastana.com) flies Heathrow to Astana from £473 return.



Or how about these...

EasyJet's new flight from Bristol to Reykjavík launches on 12 December – see in New Year with Icelandic fireworks and a Brennivín or three. From £32 one-way; easyjet.com.

Ryanair starts flying from London Stansted to Grenoble on 21 December. The French city, steeped in history and enclosed by impressive peaks, offers a proper Alpine escape, perfect for winter snow fun. From £37 one-way; ryanair.com.

Gear

PACK THIS...
Rohan

Stowaway Daypack 20
£35, rohan.co.uk

Rohan's latest pack, made from tear-resistant fabric, folds away into its own tiny pocket. It has a comfy-to-wear mesh back, plus compression straps, which mean you can carry a jacket on the outside if you need to. Genius!
>> Need a daypack for hikes and hand luggage? Check out our new comparative test on p97.



Travel Gadget

BUY THIS...
Brunton

Hydrogen Reactor
£135 (includes 2 cores)

This alternative to a solar charger uses Hydrogen Cores to recharge tablets and phones on the go. What's more, these fuel cells can be recharged (in one of many approved stores around the UK or you can buy your own recharger) an infinite number of times. One core charges an iPhone around six times. See brunton.com for more info.



Film

WATCH THIS...
Mandela

Out 3 January



This epic follows Madiba's journey from rural beginnings to his presidential election in Cape Town, via Soweto townships and Robben Island hardships. The sweeping shots are nearly matched by Idris Elba's muscular performance.
>> Read our interview with *Mandela*'s director Justin Chadwick at wanderlust.co.uk/142.



Experiences words can't describe. Memories a camera can't quite capture.

Adventures aren't found in magazines.

We can't describe your dream trip on this page.

But with over 50 years' experience, our own people and expedition vehicles all over the world, we can help you discover it.

Anything is possible.



Abercrombie & Kent

abercrombiekent.co.uk

World Food

EAT THIS...

POTATO,
FENNEL &
PEA TAGINE

Serves 4

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
 400g baby potatoes, cleaned
 1 onion, peeled and chopped
 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
 2 celery sticks, trimmed and sliced
 2 bulbs fennel, trimmed and sliced lengthways
 1 teaspoon ground ginger
 ½ teaspoon ground coriander
 ½ teaspoon ground cumin
 Sea salt
 Freshly ground black pepper
 250g shelled fresh or frozen peas
 Cold water
 1½ tablespoons of flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
 1½ tablespoons mint, finely chopped

To serve

Couscous
 Juice of 1 lemon

Method

1. Heat the olive oil over a medium heat in a casserole dish or tagine. Add the potatoes, onion and garlic, cook for 2-3 mins. Add celery and fennel and cook for a further 2-3 mins.
2. Add the ginger, cumin and coriander, and season generously with salt and pepper. Then add the peas and enough water to just cover the mixture. Bring to the boil, then lower the heat, cover and simmer for 15 mins, or until the veg is tender.
3. Add the parsley and mint, and remove the lid. Cook for 10 mins or until the sauce reduces and thickens, stirring to prevent it from sticking to the pan.
4. Lastly, add the lemon juice, drizzle with olive oil and serve with couscous.

Recipe taken from A Month In Marrakesh by Andy Harris (Hardie Grant Books, £17)

Why we're craving tasty tagines

Marrakech is a name you can almost taste. The very word is infused with the fragrances emanating from the city's souks; each letter is coloured by canary-yellow saffron, bright-orange paprika, ruby-red tomatoes. It's a feast for the eyes and nose well before the belly. And a new easyJet route from Bristol, launching this December, has made us pretty hungry...

Morocco's history has fed into its fêted cuisine: the Arab invasion brought ginger, cinnamon and caraway; a little bit of the Med arrived with the Moors in the form of olive oil and preserved lemons; the French left their pastries and wine.

The crowning jewel of this culinary culture clash is undoubtedly the tagine, the rich stew-like dish that takes its name from the earthenware pot that's used to slow-cook its

ingredients. You can put almost anything in your tagine: meat, fish, vegetables or a combo of the three. All you need to get started are some spices – salt, pepper, ginger and turmeric are the basics, but saffron, paprika, cumin and cinnamon are also commonly used.

The tagine pot itself, usually made from glazed terracotta, is placed on coals and the ingredients are left to infuse for hours. The conical lid allows steam to condense inside, rise up, then fall back down, which helps to keep the food moist and flavoursome.

Moroccan cuisine in general has been described as 'the perfumed soul of the culture'. If so, the tagine – intrinsic to the Moroccan family table, shared with couscous and bread – must be its heart. *Bristol-Marrakech flights with EasyJet launch 14 December. From £34 one-way; easyjet.com*

TOP TIP

There are two types of tagines: serving tagines and cooking tagines. The highly patterned serving vessels aren't suitable for cooking – they will crack in the heat.



Sights, sounds & scenery... Sri Lanka

Trek through lush tea plantations, indulge in seafood feasts by the Indian Ocean, cycle through the ancient Polonnaruwa ruins, climb the towering Sigiriya rock fortress, take a wildlife safari and relax on the beaches of this fascinating tropical island.

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■ Five minutes with...

CHILLED FIENNES WARMS UP



Earlier this year Sir Ranulph Fiennes had to pull out of the ultimate mission: to cross Antarctica in winter. As he releases his new book, *Cold*, we quiz him on regrets, recklessness and his tips for wannabe explorers

What has been the biggest advance in exploration over the past 20 years?

The launch of orbiting polar satellites in 1994 that enable GPS. Before that, using the sun, your watch and your shadow was the most efficient way of navigating for 1,800 miles in an area with no discernible features. Now, we pretty much know exactly where we are.

What's the biggest challenge left?

This one we're doing now – crossing Antarctica in the winter.

What first drew you to cold places?

It was tied to making a living as an explorer. You don't get sponsorship unless there's a chance of breaking a world record or of being the first somewhere. If an expedition does something that has proved impossible to predecessors, like getting to the North Pole without support, then that's what you want to go for. The polar regions were an area you could concentrate on at that time.

How hard was it pulling out of this latest expedition because of the problems with your hand?

It was actually a very easy decision because any fool would know that if a particular part of your body is for some reason not functioning, is going bad and is vital for your particular task on that particular expedition, you've got to pull out.

What is the difference between recklessness and pushing boundaries?

Being reckless is stupid because it usually ends up stopping the expedition. And the whole point of the expedition is to succeed. And the best way to succeed is to identify upfront the risks and avoid them. That way you stand a better chance of succeeding and that in turn makes your sponsors more likely to cough up next time.

Do you have any regrets?

I obviously have regrets about getting diabetes at exactly the wrong moment, which caused my hand to go the way it did and saw me pull out of this last expedition.

What about losing your fingers?

I lost them 11 years ago and it didn't stop me making a winter ascent of Everest.

How do you feel about adventurers now having to tweet, blog and video their every move?

My wife calls me a technical dinosaur. The most technological thing I own is

'My wife calls me a technical dinosaur. The most technological thing I own is a 12-year-old Nokia'

a 12-year-old Nokia that has a one-by-two inch screen. I have learned to receive texts on it, but haven't bothered to learn how to send them. You can't ignore the new ways though. This new expedition, thecoldestjourney.org, has got a website, tweets and blogs. I just let the other members of the team deal with it.

What advice would you give an explorer starting out today?

Choose an area of specialisation – the poles, mountains, sailing. And join the Royal Geographical Society and learn all you can from its archives and Expedition Advisory Office. You save a huge amount of time by doing your groundwork there.



Ran's new book. *Cold: Extreme Adventures at the Lowest Temperatures on Earth* (Simon & Schuster, £20) is out now.

■ The Big Debate

Has travel got better or worse over the past 20 years?

Better



Tim Loonen,
Tripbod.com
"Technology improvements in the past 20

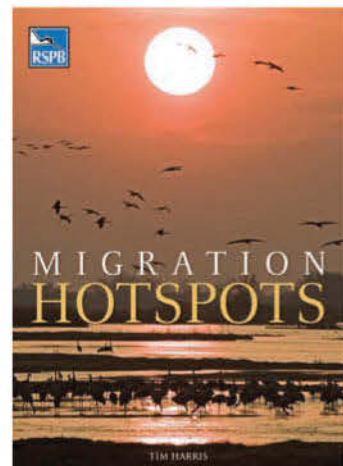
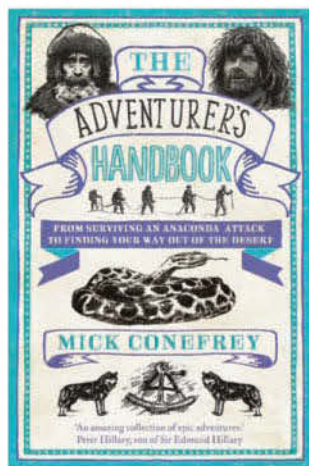
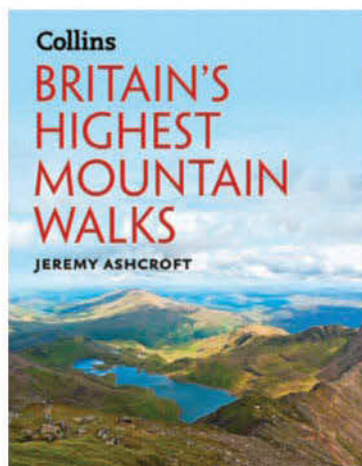
years have had the most positive impact on the travel industry. It has become so much easier to connect with people and/or companies in almost every country in the world. The immense amount of information and knowledge that has become available through innovation has shocked the industry to its core and we're only just about to get our heads around it. It's no longer the industry that decides what is best for you; it's up to the customer – you, the traveller – to start thinking what they want from their next trip."

Worse



Hilary Bradt,
guidebook publisher
"I would hate to agree with a

'it was better in my day' view but I'd have to say that travel is far less adventurous than when [Wanderlust founders] Lyn, Paul and I were doing our serious travelling. It was literally a step into the unknown, and I think we all loved that. In the developing world it was not practical to book accommodation in advance, nor did we make any attempt to keep in touch with our nearest and dearest. There's no more stepping into the obscure with only an inadequate map to guide you, so less serendipity. I am partly to blame, I suppose, with all those guidebooks to barely known countries!"



Books

Read this...

Wanderlust's picks for this month's best new books

Mountain wanderers tend to be a practical lot, so Wainwright knows what they'd make of *Britain's Highest Mountain Walks* (Collins, £20), a technically illustrated coffee-table guidebook from Jeremy Ashcroft. However, while we can't envision anyone carrying this hefty hardback while striding over Scafell, the prospect of the hiker in your life – fire on, feet up, brew in hand – delightedly pouring over the 170 spectacular routes etched out and rated here certainly seems a distinct possibility.

Cool sketches are also a feature of Mick Conefrey's re-released *The Adventurer's Handbook* (Oneworld, £11). This isn't just a bog-standard toilet read, though. Using lessons learned from the diaries of great explorers (Shackleton, Livingstone...), Conefrey charts how to undertake a huge jaunt, from planning to execution to avoiding execution. It's light-hearted but dense and literary: emergency loo roll it ain't.

Rather absorbent in a different way are the latest Jonglez *Secret* guides (from £14). Eschewing practicalities entirely for delicious detail, these 'local guides by

local people' flesh out the backstories and gossip behind the easily ignored nooks that litter great cities and reveal the lost gems hiding in plain sight. The new or updated titles include *Dublin*, *Paris*, *Venice* and *Prague*.

Birders know all about finding hidden treasures and Tim Harris's weighty *RSPB: Migration Hotspots* (A&C Black, £25) takes you to 29 of the world's top avian-influx destinations. It's practical, but perhaps lacking in the coffee-table design eye that would make anyone other than hardcore birdwatchers get twitchy.

What's On

UK EVENTS

ADVENTURE TRAVEL SHOW

London, 25-26 Jan
0871 230 7159
www.adventureshow.com
London Olympia. One day entry £8/10 adv/door; weekend entry £12/15 adv/door; half-day seminars: £55 for one, £90 for two, £160 for all four

Join the *Wanderlust* team at the annual Adventure Travel Show and enhance your writing and photography skills! We'll be holding four half-day seminars – two on travel writing and two on photography – all jam-packed with advice and inspiration to take your talent to the next level. If you can't squeeze in a seminar there's still over 100 free talks to enjoy, led by leading explorers and adventure experts, all guaranteed to whet your appetite and get your adrenalin flowing.

DESTINATIONS: THE HOLIDAY & TRAVEL SHOW

Manchester 23-26 Jan
London, 6-9 Feb
0871 230 7141
www.destinationsshow.com
EventCity Manchester: £7.50/9 adv/door. Earls Court, London: £11/13 adv/door. *Wanderlust* subscribers will receive 2 FREE tickets in the Feb issue. All *Wanderlust* readers can get 2 FREE tickets (£1.50 fee) by booking with code 'DESI' at destinationsshow.com

The UK's biggest travel show returns in 2014! Snack your way around the globe at the Taste the World hub; get expert advice from travel experts; listen to celeb talks; gawp at the *Wanderlust* Photo of the Year exhibition; and enjoy performances on the World Entertainment Stage.

Thailand honours its green initiatives



Meet the Thailand Green Excellence Award winners who are helping to preserve landscapes and cultural wonders

Whether it's saving gibbons from extinction on Phuket or providing income for local villagers, the winners of this year's Thailand Green Excellence Awards are a deserving bunch. The four awards recognise and support sustainable and responsible travel, and work to promote Thailand's dedication to conservation.

This year's winners were presented their awards by Her Royal Highness Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya Siriwatana Bhanawadee at this year's

World Travel Market exhibition in London. For more, see thailandgreenawards.com.

And the winners are...

- ◆ **Community Based Tourism category**
Lamai Homestay/Guesthouse
- ◆ **Animal Welfare category**
Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre
- ◆ **Nature, Marine and Heritage category**
Intrepid Travel
- ◆ **Volunteering Award Winner category**
Global Vision International (GVI)

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... HUSKY SLEDDING

Gee! Haw!
Head to the Arctic
to have a go at driving
your own sled



FACT

Harnessing the dogs in fan formation is practical for crossing frozen lakes – if one dog falls through the ice, the others can more easily drag it up. On narrow tracks amid trees, running two by two is more practical.

'Tis the season to mush your way over snow with canines, so become an expert – instantly!

The slice of the runners through sparkling snow; the rush of the ice-cold wind; the bark of the pack; the scent of fresh air, pine wood and, er, dog poo... there is nothing to enliven your senses like husky-sledding.

Long used as vital transport in Arctic areas, dogsleds have been superseded by snowmobiles for practical purposes. But for fun? Well, that's a different matter...

Why should I try it?

"Husky-sledding gives you a perspective on how people and animals used to cooperate in the Arctic," explains Trine Møller, manager of Solli Gjestegård in Norway, which offers husky trips. "By travelling with huskies you form a relationship. Also, you can go to remote areas, where snowmobiles are not allowed, and see untouched nature. It's a breathtaking experience."

Is it difficult?

That depends. Many companies offer trips that include guided husky-rides: you simply sit in the sled to experience the thrill while an expert drives. Alternatively you could drive your own team, for a few hours or on a multi-day cabin-to-cabin expedition.

"Tracks can be easy or challenging, but can suit everyone," says Trine. "We've taken out guests aged from four to 85 years old." The biggest challenge is dealing with cold.

What do I wear?

"Wool, in layers and layers – that's the ultimate protection," says Trine, "plus big shoes, a windproof outer and a windproof hat that covers your ears!"

How do you drive dogs?

"Use your normal voice to talk to the lead dogs," says Trine. "They have super hearing."

'Gee!' and 'Haw!' are musher-speak for right and left, though many develop their own communications. Alan Stewart, of the Cairngorm Sleddog Centre, in Scotland, uses his own 'gearbox' method: "I speak to them in different levels – high-pitched, using certain words – and it's like taking the dogs through a gearbox: first, second, third, flat out!"

Where can I try it?

Anywhere Arctic, in winter, is a good bet – north Norway, Sweden, Finland, Canada, Alaska. Or try the Cairngorm Sleddog Centre, the only daily working sleddog centre in the UK – trips are even available in summer, using wheeled sleds.

And about the dog poo...

"You *almost* never get dog poo in your face," promises Trine.

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Saturday 25 January 2014 10am-1pm
Sunday 26 January 2014 2pm-5pm

Whether you want to start a career in travel writing, document your trips for posterity or begin a blog, the Travel Writing Seminars with Wanderlust will be full of tips and information to get you on track.

- LEARN** how to turn your travels into articles and books
- IMPROVE** your writing skills and learn how to shape an article
- DEVELOP** your understanding of what editors want and how to pitch to them
- DISCOVER** how to write content that will be read – again and again



Saturday 25 January 2014 2pm-5pm
Sunday 26 January 2014 10am-1pm

Ideal for both beginner and professional photographers, whether you use a compact camera or a top-of-the-range DSLR, these seminars with Wanderlust will give you the inspiration and skills to take your travel photos to the next level.

- LEARN** how to find good subjects and tell a story in pictures
- IMPROVE** your composition, lighting and exposure
- DEVELOP** your creative photography skills with top tips from the experts
- DISCOVER** what makes an award-winning photo

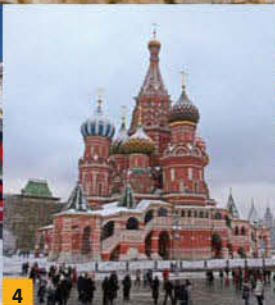


Seminar tickets start from £55 and include entry to the Adventure Travel Show – please quote 'WANDERLUSTMAG' when booking.
Calls to ticket hotline cost 10p per minute plus network extras

Both the Saturday and Sunday sessions of each seminar are designed to work alongside each other, so you can attend a single session, or come to both for a more complete overview. For the ultimate package, why not attend all four!

Be Inspired

THE COOLEST SNOWY TRIPS



Nothing can transform a landscape like snow. Innocuous hills become sparkling giants, watery lakes become icy playgrounds and, if you go far enough north, the skies might just fill with the emerald glow of the aurora.

So if you want a real winter's tale this season – something more exciting than stale mince pies and John Lewis ads – look no further. Here's *Wanderlust's* pick of the coolest snowy tours going...

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try *Wanderlust's* Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk

1. Japan

See the best of the season

Hop from shrines to springs to sculptures on *Inside Japan's Winter Highlights* tour. You'll visit Tokyo's neon lights and temples before heading to the mountainous island of Hokkaido. It's bursting with wildlife: you'll spot red-crowned cranes, crash through drift ice to spy Stellar's sea eagles and be entertained by snow monkeys before warming your limbs in a hot-spring bath. The trip ends at the Sapporo Snow Festival, so you can enjoy the ice art that takes over the city.

Who: Inside Japan (0117 370 9751, www.insidejapantours.com)

When: 4 Feb 2014 **How long:** 14 nights

How much: From £3,000 (excl flights)

2. India

Be first to tackle an ice trek

Brand new for 2014, *World Expeditions' Zaskar Ice Trek* is not for the faint-hearted. Fourteen lung-tingling days are spent deep in the Himalaya, trekking the Chadar – the ice path that forms over the Zaskar River. Passing gorges and heart-flipping scenery, you'll be walking in lands seldom experienced by foreign trekkers. Plus homestays and hilltop monastery visits offer a unique way to sample the Zaskar lifestyle and to savour the mountain vistas.

Who: World Expeditions (0800 074 4135, www.worldexpeditions.com/uk)

When: 2 Feb 2014 **How long:** 22 days

How much: From £2,190 (excl flights)

3. Switzerland

Ride the rails

From the civilised comfort of your carriage you'll enjoy winter scenery and exploring opportunities on **Ffestiniog Travel's** *Snow on the Alps* trip. Travelling through Geneva, Brig and Chur, you'll marvel at mighty glaciers and wild valleys as you ride the Centovalli line and UNESCO-listed Rhaetian Railways network. Highlights include an excursion to Tirano in northern Italy on the soaring *Bernina Express*.

Who: Ffestiniog Travel (01766 772030, www.ffestiniogtravel.com)

When: 11 Feb 2014 **How long:** 10 days

How much: From £1,680 (incl Eurostar)

4. Russia

Follow in the footsteps of aristocrats

Sample the lavish lifestyle of Russia's last Imperial dynasty with **On the Go Tours'** *Route of the Romanovs* trip. Riding the Trans-Siberian Railway, you'll see St Petersburg and visit the Romanov tombs before transferring to Moscow. Then, wind through the countryside to arrive in Yekaterinburg for dog-sledding, ice-fishing and vibrant market shopping.

Who: On the Go Tours (0207 371 1113, www.onthegotours.com)

When: Monthly, excluding Jan 2014

How long: 10 days **How much:** From £1,149 (excl flights)

5. Iceland

Discover a secret lagoon

Regent Holidays' *Lake Myvatn Nature Break* takes you away from the crowds and to the steaming landscapes around Myvatn. Spend your days amid bubbling calderas, touring Dettifoss waterfall and snow-scooting through the Krafla volcanic area; at night, hunt for the aurora.

Who: Regent Holidays (020 7666 1290, www.regent-holidays.co.uk)

When: Tailormade, 3 Feb-17 Apr 2014

How long: 4 days **How much:** From £360 (excl flights)

6. Mongolia

Enjoy festival fun

Travelling through the frosted desert of Mongolia on **Goyo Travel's** *Blue Sky, White Land – The Winter Festivals* tour, you'll spend two days at the Ice Festival on frozen Lake Khovsgol; enjoy flying

demos and an insight in to Kazakh culture at the Eagle Festival outside Ulaanbaatar; and round up the trip in the Gobi Desert for a two-day Camel Festival bonanza.

Who: Goyo Travel (01869 866520, www.goyotravel.com)

When: 28 Feb 2014 **How long:** 10 days

How much: From US\$3,440 [£2,150] (excl flights)

7. Sweden

Mush with man's best friend

Sunvil Discovery's *Silence of the Winter – Husky Experience* is no ordinary dog-sled tour. From feeding the huskies to leading your own pack, you'll be fully hands-on from the word go. Staying in the rural hamlet of Kangos, days will be spent harnessing and packing sleds before driving them through the pristine winter landscapes. Two nights in a wilderness cabin are also included.

Who: Sunvil Discovery (020 8758 4722, www.sunvil.co.uk)

When: Tailormade **How long:** 4 nights

How much: From £1,333 (incl flights)

8. Bosnia

Enjoy city sights and snowy walks

Walk on perfect powder on **Exodus'** *Snowshoeing in Bosnia* tour. You'll climb through forests and follow lakes to snowy summits before spending the night in a traditional shepherd settlement. After feasting on highland food and culture there's time for Sarajevo sightseeing too.

Who: Exodus (0845 287 7506, www.exodus.co.uk)

When: 1 & 15 Feb, 1 Mar 2014

How long: 8 days

How much: From £999 (incl flights)

9. Finland

Bed down in a bubble

The Aurora Zone's four-day *Muotka Fellside Auroras* trip crams in ice-fishing, husky-mushing, snow-shoe hikes and a reindeer farm visit. Night times are spent hunting the northern lights both by sled and heated minibus, not to mention an unusual stay in a heated bubble – perfect for spotting the lights in cosy comfort.

Who: The Aurora Zone (01670 785012, www.theaurorazone.com)

When: Various departures, Dec 2013-

Mar 2014 **How long:** 4 nights

How much: From £1,660 (incl flights)



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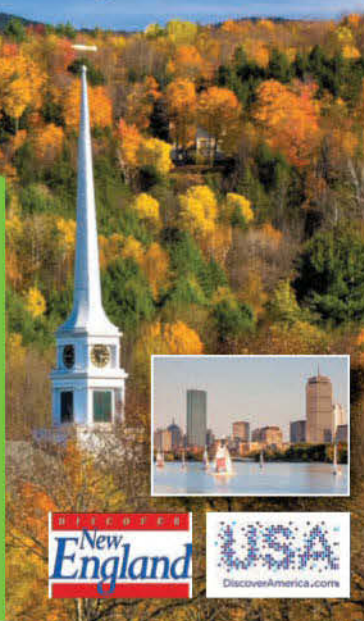
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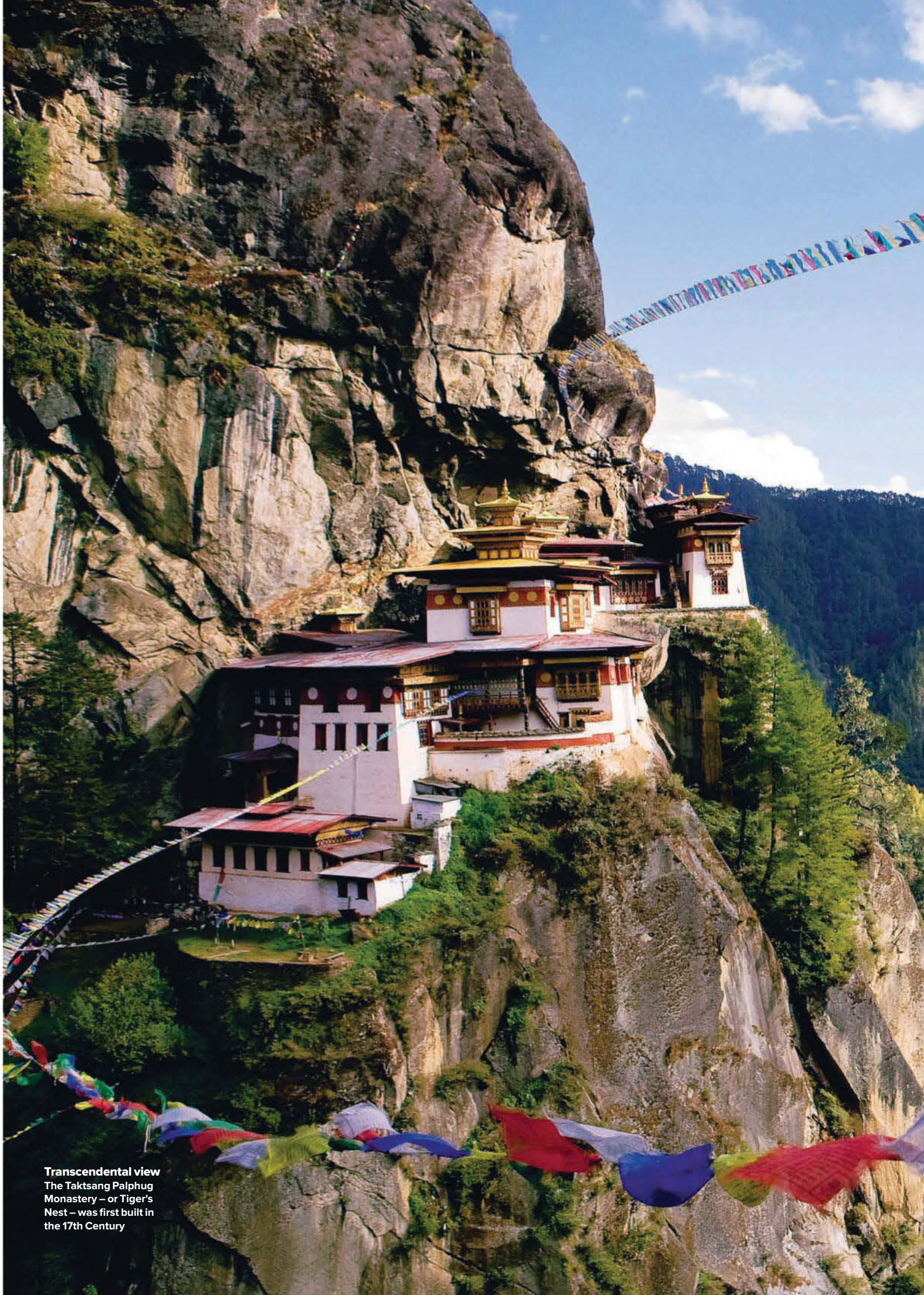


20

TRAVEL EXPERIENCES TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Over the last two decades, we've searched the planet for the ultimate in travel. To celebrate our 20th birthday, we give you the *Wanderlust* bucket list of must-do travel experiences...






Transcendental view
The Taktsang Palphug Monastery – or Tiger's Nest – was first built in the 17th Century

1 CLIMB TO A MOUNTAIN MONASTERY

Bhutan is a totally unique, virtually unspoilt pocket of Himalayan majesty, where myth and reality blur and time advances, but also stands still. And it's home to the most magical pilgrimage post of all...

WORDS **PAUL BLOOMFIELD**



Badgered Buddhists
(Clockwise from here)
Trainee monks in
Kenchogsum Lhakhang
practise debating with
each other on the
balcony overlooking
the temple; young
monks at a Buddhist
shrine in the Thimphu
Valley countryside;
lending a hand to
a struggling cyclist at
the Drukpa Kunley;
prayer flags

‘A platoon of red-robed trainee monks were demonstrating reasoning skills and mastery of holy teachings with high-decibel harangues’



The brow-beaten young man sitting alongside me was taking a tongue-lashing. “When you drink, you think you have the heart of a tiger,” his chastiser barked at him, punctuating each outburst with a wild swing of the arm. Well, I thought, who doesn’t enjoy a Red Panda beer of an evening?

“On your second bottle, you have the heart of a monkey – your behaviour becomes foolish,” he continued. OK, two beers...

“You drink a third, and before you know it you have the heart of a pig – you pass out and you’re snoring.” Ah. Yes. Possibly a valid point.

This tirade on temperance wasn’t being delivered by some long-suffering wife. I’d stumbled into the thick of a debating session at Kenchogsum Lhakhang (temple) in Bumthang, central Bhutan. On a gallery overlooking the central courtyard, a platoon of red-robed trainee monks were demonstrating reasoning skills and mastery of holy teachings with high-decibel harangues. Elders assessed their efforts while their peers sat meekly cross-legged, buffeted by the Buddhist equivalent of hellfire-and-brimstone sermons. I was cowed – and riveted.

During the previous ten days spent traversing Bhutan, I’d visited my fair share of the lhakhangs, *dzongs* (monastery-fortresses) and *goembas* for which this long-cloistered Himalayan kingdom is famed. Inevitably, my route between Paro, site of Bhutan’s only international airport, and Bumthang, spiritual heartland and gateway to the little-visited east, ticked the tourist-brochure checklist: temple, archery, festival, fortress. But I was aiming to ►



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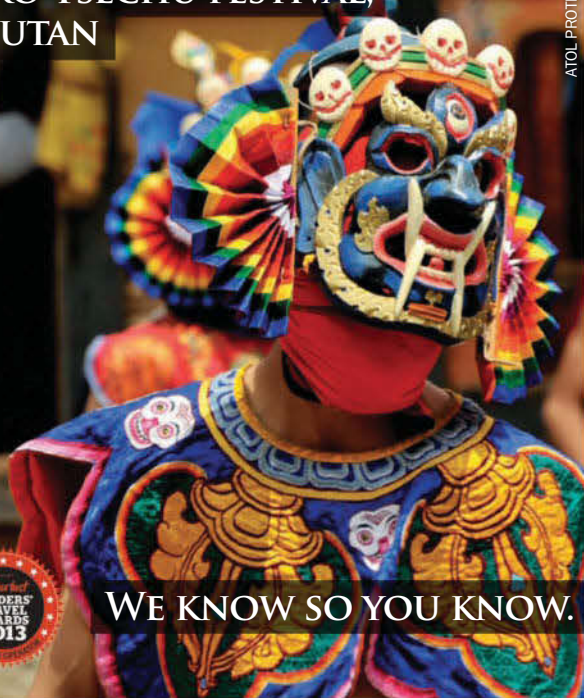
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ACCREDITED AGENT

◀ mix the must-sees with a few more low-key local experiences. And I was hoping to scratch beneath the well-preserved surface of Bhutan's culture just a little – which is what saw me, with my guide Phub Tshering (known as PT), exploring the Chokhor Valley and dropping in on those monologuing monks.

What made Kenchogsum most fascinating, though, wasn't just the debates, nor its historic architecture – in fact, it's a building site. The central temple burned down three years ago and, while worship and study continues around the construction, across the road artisans are diligently carving intricate designs into the wooden framework for the phoenix now rising from the ashes.

That's the thing about Bhutan's venerable Buddhist edifices. Yes, they're eye-catching, adorned with exquisite carvings and paintings of mystical creatures and terrifying-looking deities. But it's not the architecture that's most memorable; rather, it's the back-stories. Call it heritage or history, folklore or psychogeography, but these legends are the weft through which Bhutan's culture is woven.

The temples and monasteries are the tales made solid – but not necessarily permanent. Each owes its existence to a holy vision or a supernatural act: a goddess appearing in a blue flame, a saint

vanquishing a demon. Kenchogsum, for example, means 'three divine beings' – it's named for a trio of Buddha statues that flew here from eastern Bhutan. Or so the legend goes. It's a recurring theme that became apparent on my first day in the country, on the trek up to its most famous sight: the 'Tiger's Nest'.

The top temple

There are many reasons why a temple might be built in a lofty, inaccessible nook – isolation from secular society and protection from attack being two. But a less prosaic explanation applies to Taksang Goemba. In the eighth century, a vertiginous cliff some 10km north of Paro was chosen as a meditation site by the region's foremost guru, who arrived here on a flying tiger. Ergo: a temple.

It may also be no coincidence that pilgrims must undertake a lung-bursting trek up a steep, rocky track to reach it – giving us tiger-deprived mortals a chance to earn merit (and some cracking photos) in the process. And plenty do. Taksang is Bhutan's Machu Picchu, its Taj Mahal – the cliff-face that launched a thousand postcards. Fortunately, since tourist numbers are relatively puny, the path is hardly overrun.

At the start of the trail, PT donned the traditional robe called a *gho*, like a baggy dressing gown with built-in manbag into which necessities (prayer beads, mobile phone) can be tucked, and we strode between chiming prayer wheels into the pine forest. Two hours of huffing, past crimson rhododendrons and scampering grey langurs, brought us to the highest viewpoint. By now, I was in no state to scamper – at 3,000m, it's not just the photogenic mountaintop monastery that takes the breath away.

But while a head for heights is useful, a superhuman memory for names – plus an ability to suspend disbelief – is also handy. "Guru Rinpoche – we call him Padmasambhava – introduced Buddhism to Bhutan in AD746," PT explained as we made the final approach to the temple complex, underneath tangled webs of prayer flags and past clusters of many-hued *tsatsas*, miniature clay stupas. ►

'Praying for the end of all suffering, devotees placed offerings – money, fruit, instant noodles – at a groaning table tended by monks'



"No Xbox?"
The monks at Trashi Chhoe Dzong sort through the mass of offerings given by the queueing locals

**How green is
my valley?**

The lush Thimpu
landscape looms over
Trashi Chhoe Dzong –
the seat of Bhutan's
government – where
(right) a monk pops
his head out of the
main lhakhang







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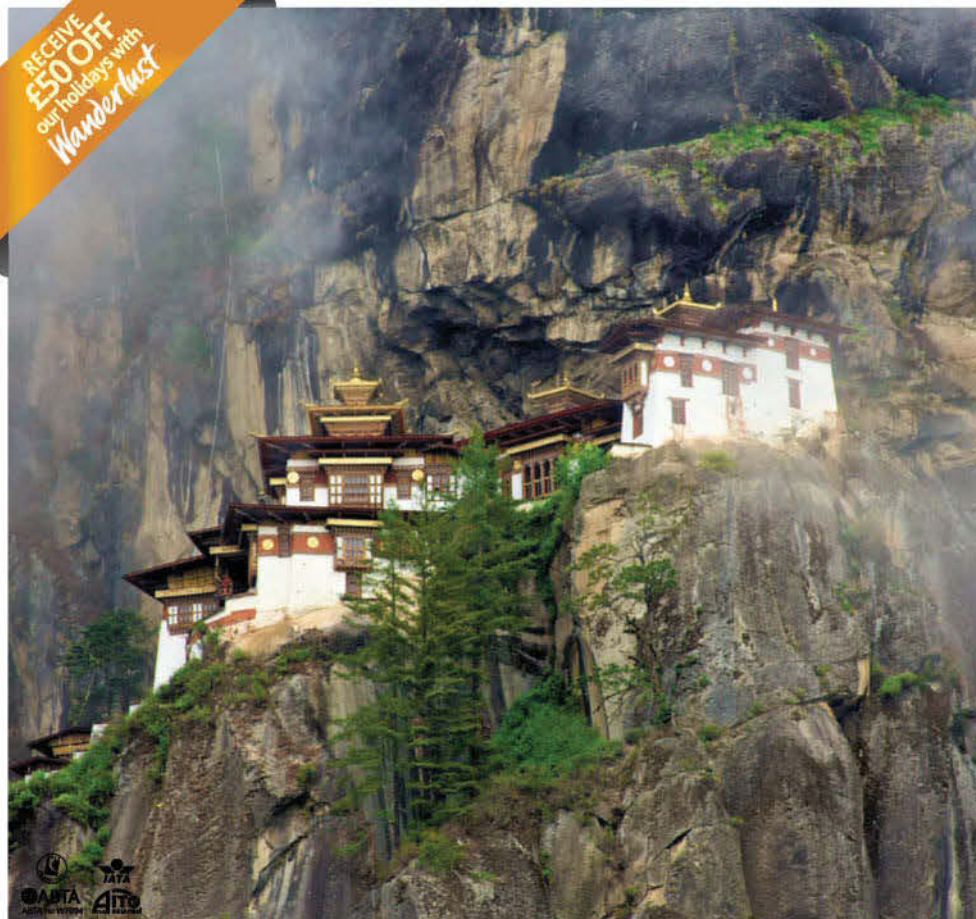


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'Wrist stinging from the bowstring's snap, elbow aching, ego trembling, after half an hour I was ordered to dance like a donkey – penance for losing'

◀ "He flew here on the back of a tiger, then meditated in a cave for three years, three months, three weeks, three days and three hours." Confused? I was.

The religious complex was built above that sacred cave in 1692, and still seems wreathed in the solemn mysteries of the ages. But though the temple looks ancient, it's mostly little more than a decade old. Taktsang burned down in 1950 and again in 1998 – a common hazard in Bhutan's wood-framed temples, which are hung with lavish textiles and flicker with unshielded butter lamps. Perhaps the physical fragility of Bhutan's historic sites helps explain why its people put so much store by culture.

The national sport

Culture, of course, isn't just religion and art; sport, too, plays its part. In Bhutan, archery isn't merely the secular national obsession – it's what defines men. If you're born a boy, you're born an archer.

A visit to Paro's archery ground made the point. Here, teams of gho-clad contestants, identified by coloured and numbered sashes, gossiped and chanted. Where's the target? I asked. Smirking, PT pointed at a vanishingly distant white blob at the far end of the field. I could barely see the metre-high target at 140m away, let alone

dream of hitting it. In fact, the only way I could tell a successful shot was from the competitors' reactions. When an archer hit home, he would bow to the target while his team erupted in what appeared to be a morris dance (actually an imitation of the black-necked crane's courtship leaps), crooning a special ditty.

As PT and I retreated to the garden of our guesthouse, where a pair of targets had been erected for us, I asked how boys learn to shoot. Did he have lessons in school?

"Lessons?" he snorted. "No – it's in our blood. A boy will receive his first bamboo bow, made by his father, at the age of six. Then it's all down to practise."

My blood, it seemed, was sadly archery-free. We started with the targets only 20m apart – which proved more than far enough. Wrist stinging from the bowstring's snap, elbow aching, ego trembling, after half an hour I was ordered to dance like a donkey – penance for losing.

The festival

Two days later, music of a very different kind was soundtracking our arrival at Thimphu's mighty Trashi Chhoe Dzong. As we queued alongside what seemed like (and probably wasn't far off) the city's ►



Hitting the spot
The captain of an archery team takes a shot in Paro during a hotly contested late afternoon match

Living on a prayer
(left to right) Prayer flags hang on a makeshift frame in the primula-dotted Phobjikha valley; a bearded monk on the road; devotees throng the courtyard of Thimphu's Trashi Chhoe Dzong, queuing to pass beneath the huge, colourful thondrol



◀ entire population, from inside the high stone walls came the beating of drums and the drone of the temple flute. We passed the thoroughly untraditional security scanners and joined the masses filing in through huge, gilded doors.

"It is the anniversary of the day Siddhartha Gautama was born and took his first seven steps," PT explained, "which was also the day he attained enlightenment and, later, passed from physical embodiment."

Cometh the day, cometh the deity – and this dzong is certainly worthy of hosting the event. It's not merely a vast stone bastion. Housing government ministries, Bhutan's main monastic body and the king's throne room, it's the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace combined. The importance of that latter aspect can't be overstated: although (or perhaps because) Bhutan's monarchy is just over a century old, the royal family is universally revered. I'd guess 90% of the people I encountered wore badges depicting the Fifth King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, and his young bride. No wonder the dzong was thronged.

We shuffled forward, incense curling and billowing from burners alongside the snaking queue. People broke off to whirl prayer wheels set in a nearby wall before returning to the line, murmuring mantras. As we rounded the corner of the central tower, we finally caught sight of the big draw: a vast, vividly embroidered *thondrol* (wall hanging) depicting the Sakyamuni (historical Buddha) and disciples, reputedly 200 years old and unfurled for just a few hours on this day each year.

"Families come to pray for an end of suffering for all sentient beings, now and in the future," explained PT. Devotees placed offerings – money, fruit, packets of instant dried noodles – at a groaning table tended by monks beneath the thondrol. Then

they paid their respects at a parasol-shaded case containing relics (tooth and bone) of Buddha, before climbing to the main temple to genuflect before looming statues of Buddha, Padmasambhava and Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal, the 17th-century Tibetan ruler credited with unifying Bhutan.

As mid-morning came and went, the volume – of both the temple instruments and pilgrim crowds – surged: time was running short. At 11.30am sharp, before the sun's rays hit the fabric, the thondrol was rolled away to be stored in the temple for another year, and a collective breath was released.

The homestay

Phobjikha, a broad glacial basin in central Bhutan, is strikingly different from the steep-sided, paddy-lined valleys farther west. Tiny hamlets are scattered around the edge of a marshy central area dotted with primulas, wild strawberries and ferns, and grazed by a few cows. One of Bhutan's most important nature reserves, it's best known as the wintering ground of some 350 rare black-necked cranes, known locally as *thrung-thrung* or *lhuh-bja* – 'heavenly birds' – that arrive here from Tibet each October.

I arrived too late to see the cranes – they depart in March – though a stroll was rewarded with sightings of hoopoes, skylarks and red-billed choughs, plus a pugmark that PT swore was a leopard's. But even in the absence of cranes, Phobjikha offers a compelling alternative to the standard tourist itinerary, with a handful of farmstays allowing visitors to experience rural life at first hand.

Phub Gyeltshen's farmhouse, nestling at the upper end of the valley, is every inch the typical Bhutanese home, its timber frame beautifully adorned with traditional motifs. Inside, though, things



‘When winter comes and we can neither tend crops nor watch TV, we huddle around the stove and listen to my grandparents telling stories’

have been reshuffled to accommodate first-floor guest-rooms. The family – four generations, from septuagenarian grandparents to toddlers – now sleeps on the ground-floor, where previously potatoes and pine needles (used for cattle bedding) were stored, and new outbuildings house a kitchen and guest lounge.

I joined Sonam Wangmo, my host’s English-speaking daughter, in the lounge to warm up with a mug of *sud-ja* – butter tea, which tastes much as you’d expect tea mixed with salty butter to taste. “Life is changing rapidly here,” she told me. “New roads allow farming communities to transport crops – we’re increasingly a cash economy. We used to grow buckwheat for noodles and animal feed, but now we produce mainly potatoes to sell to India, and buy in rice.” Electricity arrived a couple of years ago, brought in through underground cables to avoid interfering with the cranes’ migratory flights, and mobile phones and TV satellite dishes are proliferating.

But change is kept in check by both tradition and climate. “When winter comes, snow blankets both the fields and our satellite dish,

so we can neither tend crops nor watch TV,” Sonam said. What do you do then, I asked? She smiled. “We do as we’ve always done. We huddle around the *bukhari* (wood-burning stove), eat and listen to my grandfather and grandmother telling stories.”

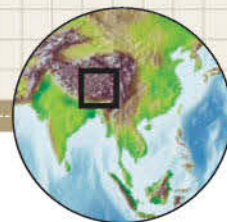
As dusk drew in, we joined the rest of the family seated cross-legged around the glowing kitchen stove. The TV was chuntering, but only the kids were really watching. The adults passed around a tub of betel and lime paste, broad smiles revealing red-stained teeth. Namgay – Sonam’s mother, head of the household – wielded a frightening-looking cleaver to hack apart a lump of dried beef, which she simmered with chillies and *nakey* (fern fronds).

After dinner – beef stew with rice and the ubiquitous national dish *ema datse* (chillies in cheese) – Namgay proffered a bottle of clear liquid: *arra*, the local barley firewater. Sipping the dangerously smooth spirit, a TV on one side and the traditional stove to the other, I pondered the impact of the changes sweeping across Bhutan.

In that cosy kitchen, PT dug out some telling recent stats: 93% of the population now has a mobile phone, up from 39% in 2007, yet only 35% has a sofa; 58.5% own a TV – but 60% have a *choesum* (prayer room) in their house. Things change, but they don’t, too. Electricity, TV, phones and roads spread fast, but it will take much longer for the country’s attitudes and values to be affected.

“As a citizen, I think it’s important to uphold our culture,” mused PT. “That doesn’t just mean national costume, festivals or dances. It’s about our sense of being Bhutanese.” 🇧🇹

Paul Bloomfield is an award-winning travel writer and photographer with a love of the great outdoors. Follow him on Twitter @paulbtravel



Bhutan Footnotes

VITAL STATS

Capital: Thimphu

Population: 700,000

Languages: Dzongkha plus 18 regional dialects. English is commonly understood.

Time: GMT+6

International dialling code: +975

Visas: Required by UK nationals; arranged by your tour operator.

Money: Ngultrum (Nu), pegged to the Indian rupee, currently around Nu100 to the UK£. Foreign cards not widely accepted; bring US dollars.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Autumn** Cool air, clear skies, good trekking

■ **Winter** Fine for sightseeing, snow can block roads

■ **Spring** Dry and cloudy

■ **Summer** Hot and wet

Health & safety

Yellow fever vaccination needed if arriving from an affected country. **Malaria** is prevalent in southern regions. High altitudes can cause **breathlessness**. Drink only bottled water.

Further info

Bhutan
(Lonely Planet, 2011)
tourism.gov.bt – official TB site

More Online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/142 for links to more content

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- **Footpaths to enlightenment:** east Bhutan – issue 117, Jan 11
- **Bhutan:** 7 treks – online, Jan 11
- **Bhutan Blueprint** – issue 100, Dec/Jan 09

PLANNING GUIDES

- **Bhutan guide**

THE TRIP

The author travelled with **Mountain Kingdoms** (01453 844400, www.mountainkingdoms.com) on a bespoke trip exploring the west and centre of Bhutan. A sample private 14-day itinerary visiting Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Phobjikha, Trongsa and Bumthang, and including the Paro Tsechu, a bike ride from Dochu La and two nights in Kathmandu, costs £3,566pp, including flights based on two people sharing. Specialist cycling tours are also available.

Getting there

Transport will be organised by your tour operator – independent travel isn't permitted. No direct flights from the UK. Most visitors arrive at the only international airport, Paro, on national carrier **Druk Air** (drukaair.com.bt), usually from Kathmandu (1hr) or Delhi (2hrs). **Qatar Airways** (qatarairways.com) flies London Heathrow-Kathmandu via Doha (£750 return). Journey time is from around 15 hours.

Overland entry is possible at from India and West Bengal.



Getting around

Internal flights are often cancelled because of poor weather or low bookings. **Local buses** serve major towns, but your tour operator will usually organise private transport. **Cycling** is being promoted by the government. Expect sparse traffic and generally gentle gradients, if long climbs.



Cost of travel

For tourists the government imposes a minimum **daily tariff** of US\$250pp (US\$200pp Dec-Feb and Jun-Aug) that you have to spend. This includes three-star stays, meals, domestic land transport, guides, entry fees and the US\$65 daily tourist royalty fee. Prices usually exclude taxes and service; add an extra 20%.



Accommodation

Three-star hotels offer comfortable en-suite rooms. A luxury option such as the stylish **Uma** hotels (comohotels.com) and **Amankora** resorts (amanresorts.com), will add several hundred pounds per day.



Food & drink

The national dish is **ema datse**, chillies and cheese: tasty, fiery and ubiquitous. Fresh asparagus and fried **nakey** (fern fronds) are spring treats. Red Panda wheatbeer and Druk lager are fine brews.

WESTERN BHUTAN HIGHLIGHTS

1 Taksang Goemba The 3,000m hike up to the cliff-side 'Tiger's Nest' is unmissable.

2 Archery ground, Paro Watch expert archers ping arrows at a barely visible target.

3 Weekend market & National Institute for Zorig Chusum, Thimphu

Shop for chillies, cheese and terrifying masks and then watch artists practise traditional crafts in the National Institute.

4 Dochu La Gasp at the vista across to 7,000m-plus peaks from this pass above Thimphu.

5 Chimi Lhakhang Be blessed by a holy phallus at this temple dedicated to the 'Divine Madman' Lama Drukpa Kunley.

6 Phobjikha Valley Experience traditional rural life and watch hundreds of beautiful black-necked cranes in winter.

7 Trongsa Dzong Monastery-fortress in a spectacular setting.

8 Jampey Lhakhang Built in AD 659, this small temple hosts the annual 'naked dance' festival in October.

NEED TO KNOW

Bring earplugs! The countless street dogs sleep all day and bark all night. Smokers need a permit to puff. Wi-Fi is commonly available in hotels, though usually slow.





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WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE:

What's the old adage? That we know more about outer space than we do about our oceans? Perhaps that explains why it's so

moving to glimpse what lies beneath: to peer down at reefs teeming with life; to witness weird rock walls suddenly plunge to an inky abyss; or to get the hang of scuba diving, so you can float with the fishes, and feel for all the world like you're able to fly.

WHERE: Australia's Great Barrier Reef is the natural choice; choose dive and snorkel sites on the Outer Reef for more pristine coral. Belize has the world's second-largest reef, and some very accessible sites. Indonesia has unspoiled coral, with abundant fish; consider Sulawesi. Going underwater in the Galápagos offers the chance to fin with inquisitive seal lions plus some oddities: equatorial penguins, marine iguanas and more. At Silfra in Iceland you can snorkel the gap between continents.

NEED TO KNOW: Don't touch anything, and keep a respectful distance from all marine species.

3

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WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE:

Sometimes it's good to remember the world doesn't revolve around you; to feel really, really small. And there's nothing like standing before one of the world's great manmade or natural wonders to do just that. Gazing at two billion years of canyon or a gobsmackingly dreamy dome of marble puts petty worries into perspective.

WHERE: True travel icons still astonish even though you've seen a thousand postcards. However, timing and approach can enhance the experience. For instance, approach the rock-hewn city of Petra via the narrow Siq (or, better, via the Dana-Petra hike); visit the Taj Mahal at sunrise, or plan to visit at full moon; walk to Machu Picchu via the Inca Trail; hire a bike to explore the outer temples of Cambodia's Angkor complex; and hike down into the Grand Canyon rather than simply staring from up top.

NEED TO KNOW: You can't totally escape the crowds, but research to identify the quietest times – consider visiting off-season, early, late; overnight or pay extra for a behind-the-scenes tour.

Eat something you can't identify

Expand your culinary horizons

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE: Is there anything more depressing than hearing one of your tour-mates shun the lovely-looking local speciality and ask, 'Where's the nearest McDonald's? There's a world of wonderful food out there and eating new, weird, wonderful, unidentifiable dishes is a good grounder in a country; it also shows respect for the local people. And, being open to trying new things may open more doors – invites to family dinners or traditional restaurants.

WHERE: Everywhere! One *Wanderlust*-er recalls enduring an interesting Cypriot offal-fest that tested the limits of travel politeness... But it's made a good story for years since. China is bound to widen your palate: indecipherable menus, unheard of ingredients. Experts say that, with a world food crisis looming, we'll all be eating insects soon anyway, so get in some practise. Try Australia (grubs), Cambodia (spiders) and Uganda (grasshoppers) for a start.

NEED TO KNOW: Don't eat mindlessly. In some places endangered species can end up on plates, which tourists should not encourage. If you're suspicious, give it a miss.

4

Live like a local

Don't just pass through like a tourist


WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE: Shun

hotels for homestays, take a cookery course, study the language rather than SHOUTING EN-GER-LISH... There are lots of ways to dip deeper into the culture of your destination. You'll never be truly local of course, but by engaging at every opportunity, you'll be sucking life's marrow to the maximum and stand to take far more from your travels than a nice tan.

WHERE: The internet has made it far easier to research and book local experiences. You can stay in family homes, on other people's sofas or even in temples (Korea has a well-organised network). Greeter guides can be found worldwide; some are proud locals offering free tours of their home patch, others are individuals with a particular passion – maybe Buenos Aires tango bars or Munich breweries – they're keen to share. You're much more likely to pick it up faster, especially if you board with a local family while you study. ►

5



A black one-horned rhino and its calf are standing in a dry, yellowish-brown field. The rhino is on the right, facing right, and the calf is on the left, facing left. In the background, there are rolling hills and a large, flat-topped mountain under a clear blue sky. The foreground is filled with dry grass and small rocks.

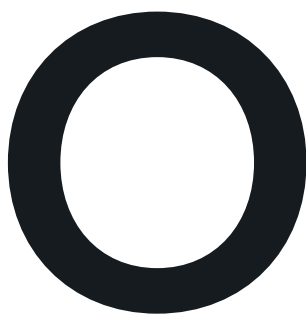
Rhino revelation
Namibia is home the
largest number of
free-roaming black
one-horned rhino



SAVE A SPECIES BY GOING TO SEE IT

**The animals of Namibia's north-west are on the up!
Wanderlust's founder celebrates our 20th anniversary
by investigating this conservation success story**

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **LYN HUGHES**



One morning – that’s all it takes to fall for Namibia. It’s something to do with all that spectacular space – the southern African nation has one of the lowest population densities on the planet. But it’s also to do with how that space is cared for. Thanks to pioneering community conservation schemes and some inspirational

individuals, Namibia is that rarest of things: a wildlife success story.

I spent two weeks in the country. But a single morning in the Kunene region, a wilderness of granite kopjes and endless horizons in Namibia’s north-west, summed it all up.

8am, 23 October 2013: “Rhino urine!”

Garth picked up a stone from a pile of rocks that had been stained white. “The male rhino likes to mark its scent by using urine. Its penis points backwards – this is splashback.”

It was the fourth day of my exploration of southern Kunene, led by the Gandalf-like figure of Garth Owen-Smith. We had

driven by 4WD through vast, ancient landscapes: gravel plains, flat-top mountains, brooding granite outcrops, plains of basalt boulders. It’s an arid, rugged land, the oldest desert on earth. However, despite the seemingly harsh conditions, we spotted plenty of life, from groups of skittish oryx, with their distinctive long, straight horns, to mountain zebra, ostrich and springbok.

At night we camped in one beautiful spot after another: in a tree-fringed dried-up riverbed; on a sandy hillside with dramatic views; next to a pretty river, running despite a two-year drought; and at Wereldsend (“World’s End”), an education centre at the forefront of the community conservancy movement.

I had been tempted here by the possibility of tracking desert elephants, lions and rhinos. But, just as fascinating, was hearing about the human element of Namibia’s conservation story.

The statistics are staggering. The country has the largest number of free-roaming black rhino in the world, and the largest number of cheetahs. It is the only country where lion numbers are increasing. Elephants, too, have grown in number, with the desert elephants of the north-west increasing from around 20 in 1995 to 150 now. What’s more, the majority of these animals live outside national parks.



Eat my dust
You're unlikely to see another vehicle while out exploring the Kunene wilderness

"There are elephants just down river from here, and we know lion are around," Garth had announced on the first evening. "If you need to get up in the night, just go behind your tent!"

Around 46% of Namibia's land is protected in some way, and this percentage is creeping up all the time. Uniquely, conservation is even enshrined in the country's constitution. But Namibia's approach is very different to the rest of the world. It was Garth who first pioneered active local involvement in conservation, proposing that communities would help take care of the wildlife, and also reap the benefits that followed.

After Namibia's independence from South Africa in 1990, the way was cleared to move forwards with the idea of communal conservancies; by 1998 the first were formed.

The community gains in several ways. Trophy hunters come to shoot carefully selected animals, creating a very lucrative revenue stream. The increasing number of game animals means that some need to be 'harvested' each year, providing locals with meat. But tourism is the biggest growth area, and now the biggest earner. Lodges are set up as joint ventures between communities and investors, providing both revenue and jobs. Rhino monitors are recruited from the community; local

people also have the opportunity to become guides and trackers.

There are now 79 community conservancies in Namibia, with more to come. They cover nearly 20% of the country, and one in five rural Namibians lives within them. The people have chosen to live with the wildlife.

8.33am: "There's a leopard and a cub!"

We'd stopped by a spring, which was marked by salvadora bushes and overlooked by a cliff. This was to be our best chance of seeing a rhino, so our other guide, Boas Hambo, had walked down to the spring, through the bushes, while we held back at a safe distance. When he returned he was agitated and breathless.

"There was a little leopard cub, just a few metres away." Which inevitably meant that there must be a mother leopard very close too. And she wouldn't be impressed at our appearance – only the previous evening, amid hair-raising stories of animal encounters, Boas had told us how a lion could be chased away, but not an angry female leopard: "She'll just keep on coming."

As we went to leave the spot, there was movement on the cliff-face. A leopard was making her way purposefully up it, her cub a few metres behind. Within seconds they'd disappeared over the ►



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‘Rhinos copulate for 30 to 45 minutes – which may be why the horn is considered an aphrodisiac in parts of the Far East’

◀ top. “That’s only the seventh leopard I’ve seen,” said Boas. I hoped it was a talisman.

It was desert lions that we had been hoping to see the day before. Renowned lion researcher Dr Philip ‘Flip’ Stander (*pictured right*) had popped by our camp on the first night, and revealed that he was searching for two sets of lions – a mother with some new cubs and a small group of sub-adults. He was intending to dart two of the lions to collar and measure them, and promised he would let us know when he found one group or the other.

The next day we’d followed the dried-up bed of the Huab River, and came across a set of tracks from the night before. Looking around we came across another set of tracks in the sand, and then another larger set. It was the sub-adult group.

Flip had driven over in his distinctive khaki-coloured Land Cruiser and jumped out, bushy-bearded and barefoot. Obsessed with his beloved lions, he is out night and day looking for them; his arms were covered with felt-penned data. Flip burned with intensity as he discussed where the lions could possibly be.

He’d headed up into the mountains to look for them, and we’d diverted to Slungpost, where a lion-proof *kraal* (cattle enclosure) had been built. With the region in drought, the herders were taking the cattle further afield to find water and grazing, but this made them more vulnerable to lions. As a sobering insight into the problems the community face, we heard that 18 months ago this was a herd of 70 cattle – now it was just 19. With lion numbers growing, there is increasing conflict.

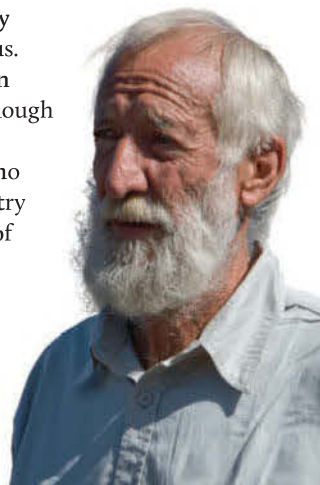
Back at camp we’d been told that Flip would phone in by satellite if he came across the lions – but that could be at any time, even three in the morning. I’d lain awake all night, fully dressed, hoping for the call. But it never came.

9.07am: “It’s not looking good...”

We kept spotting rhino tracks and piles of droppings, but nothing fresh. “Let’s try the Springbok River,” said Garth. “It’s about our only chance unless we are extremely lucky.”

Rhinos are territorial. They mark their range with urine and dung, which they kick to help spread the scent, not least because some of it sticks to their feet. “They copulate for 30 to 45 minutes,” Garth told us. “That may be why the horn is considered an aphrodisiac in parts of the Far East, even though it is only hair.” Made of keratin, the same substance as hair and fingernails, rhino horn has no magical properties at all – but try telling that to the growing middle-classes of Vietnam and China.

At Wereldsend Garth had shown us the shocking sight of dozens of rhino and elephant skulls. They dated back to 1982, when he first arrived here to work for the Namibia Wildlife Trust. In his first year he found the carcasses of 52 poached rhinos and 148 elephants. However, he ►





**Tales from
the river bed**
(clockwise from this)
Elephants are most
commonly found
foraging in the
dried-up river beds;
Dr Flip Stander; oryx
in shade of midday
sun; lion prints in the
dry riverbed



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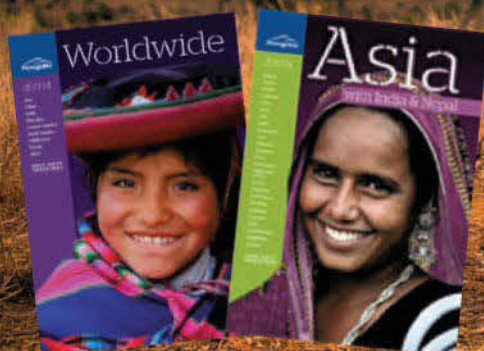
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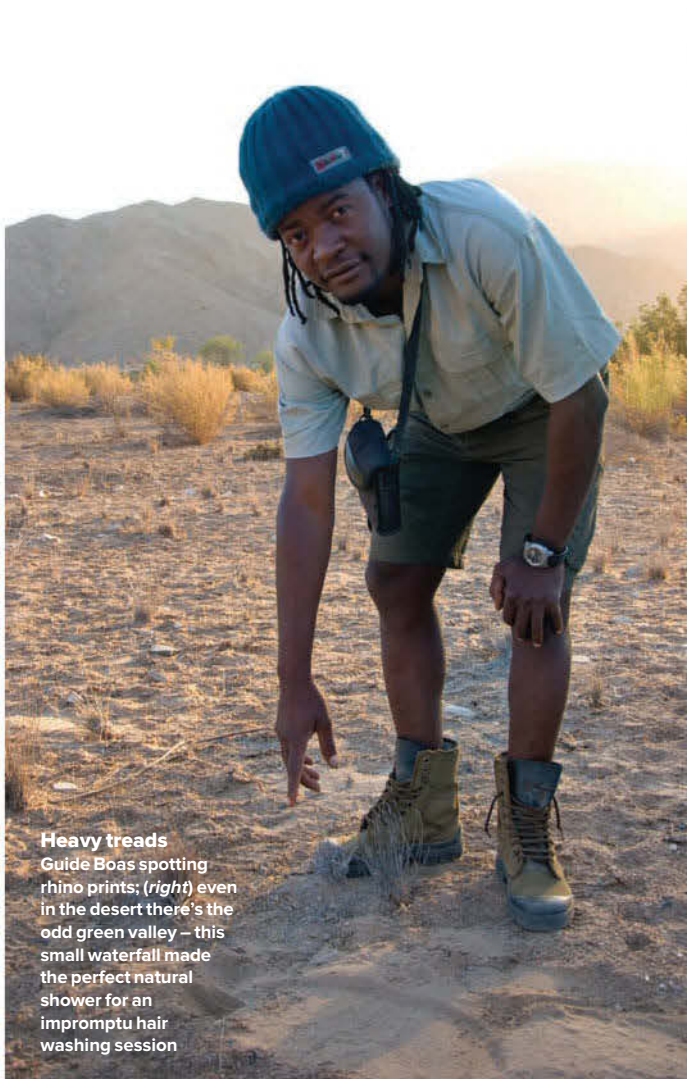
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Heavy treads

Guide Boas spotting rhino prints; (right) even in the desert there's the odd green valley – this small waterfall made the perfect natural shower for an impromptu hair washing session



◀ was instrumental in getting community guard positions created, and in winning local support. When a rhino was poached by a local in December 2011, the poacher was named by the community and arrested within 48 hours.

Garth is modest about his role in the creation of community conservancies and their success. “The story is not mine – I’ve been given too much credit for it. The people who really deserve the credit are the people of this area. They have shown the rest of the world what can be done.”

It is true that there are many who have helped the conservancy movement succeed, and they have had the support of various bodies, including the WWF and World Bank. But it is clear that Garth has been a catalyst. Even the company we are travelling with, of which he is a trustee, is owned by Herero and Himba communities.

We drove on past a ‘forest’ of welwitschia plants, their two leaves shredded to ribbons by hundreds of years of weather. Often referred to as living fossils, these extraordinary plants are believed to date back to the Jurassic period, and individual plants can live for 1,000 years or more. Indeed, some may be more than 2,000 years old.

Endemic to northern Namibia and southern Angola, they are an arresting sight. And at least they are not poisonous like the most common plant we saw, the infamous *Euphorbia damarana*. Stories about it abound, from the legend of the miners who died after eating food that had been barbecued over euphorbia branches, to

Garth’s eye-watering tale of an acquaintance who’d got a few drops of the plant’s milky latex on his hands, and then gone for a pee...

9.22am: “Rhino tracks – fresh ones”

We pulled up, and examined a set of fresh tracks, which were heading down towards a dried-up riverbed, fringed by salvadora bushes and mopane trees. Boas equipped himself with a radio, camera and binoculars, and headed down towards the river. Only the night before he had told us how you should never track alone: “You can be so busy looking at the tracks that you can walk straight into the rhino.”

Although famously grumpy, black rhinos have poor eye sight. So, providing you see them first, and keep your distance, you should be alright. Nevertheless, Boas had run us through his Rhino Survival 101 the night before: 1) don’t wear black or white; 2) don’t wear perfume; 3) keep quiet – their hearing is at least twice as good as a human’s; 4) wear walking boots; 5) work out your escape route.

Boas, a Himba, had seen his first rhino when he was a toddler – the animal had meandered right past his house, causing the whole family to run inside to hide. At the age of six he started to tend his family’s goats, and developed a healthy respect for all wild animals, including the rhinos, which he would take care to avoid surprising.

These days Boas is more worried about bumping into an elephant. Kunene’s desert-adapted elephants are nowhere near as habituated to humans and vehicles as the animals you find in some of Africa’s national parks. The previous day we had come ▶

Highs and lows

(clockwise from here)

Long-necked giraffe often browse along the dry river bed; the black rhino makes a rare appearance; a local Himba woman; Namibia's two year drought has severely effected vegetation away from the river bed





‘We each wandered off in silence to contemplate the view; it felt as if we had Africa at our feet’

◀ across a large bull with a fine set of tusks. He was browsing in a lush reedbed, next to a pool formed by a spring. We kept a respectful distance from him and, although aware of our presence, he kept his back to us as he got on with the serious business of eating.

10am: “The wind has changed...”

“...And that’s not good for us,” said Garth, pulling on his pipe. We had driven on and up a steep hill that overlooked an epic view. From the dried-up riverbed far below, two curious giraffes stared up at us. On the plain behind them was a herd of mountain zebra and – visible through the binoculars – small groups of ostrich, oryx, kudu and springbok.

There has been a two-year drought in the north-west, and many of the animals looked skinny. They can usually find water as the area is scattered with natural springs but it is harder to find food. In many cases, these desert-adapted animals have learned to browse rather than just graze. Even the domestic cows could be seen browsing bushes and trees.

Earlier, we’d had the option to mountain-bike rather than take the vehicles. I’d declined but, now, the keen cyclists came huffing and puffing up the hill. We each wandered off in silence to contemplate the view; it felt as if we had Africa at our feet.

At least some good news had come in. “Flip’s alive,” reported Garth, relieved. He had clearly been more concerned about Flip’s lack of contact than he’d let on. Then the radio crackled again – it was Boas. “Come down to the spot where we saw the ostrich earlier. Park there and walk...”

11.11am: Somewhere in Africa, a rhino will have been poached this morning

A hundred metres in front of me, in the shade of a shepherd tree, an ear twitched. Gradually more of the shape came into view. Two ears, a heavy head and the great horn of a mature male rhino. It was sobering to think that his horn would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in China or Vietnam. Although we were upwind of him, he turned his huge skull towards us, sensing there was something of which he needed to be aware.

Boas recorded the sighting in his rhino monitor notebook and took a photo. We stood in silence for a few more minutes. There was little sense in causing the rhino any stress by moving closer, so we turned away. I paused, looked back over my shoulder and saw him relax, happily secure and safe in his world. 📷

Wanderlust’s Editor-in-Chief and founder **Lyn Hughes** has travelled on every continent. You can catch her on Twitter @Wanderlust_Lyn



Namibia Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Windhoek
Population: 2.1 million
Languages: English, Afrikaans, German, regional languages
Time: GMT+1 (GMT+2 Sept-Apr)
International dialling code: +264
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Namibian dollar (NAD/N\$), currently N\$16 to the UK£. It is pegged to the South African rand, which you can also use. ATMs are not widespread.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Chance of rain in some areas
- Moderate weather; no crowds
- Cool; clear; high season
- Hottest months; good birding

Health & safety

Malaria is rare, but take advice. Yellow fever certificate needed if travelling from a risk area. Don't approach wild animals without an expert guide.

Further info

Namibia (Bradt, 2011)
An Arid Eden (Gazelle, 2011) by Garth Owen-Smith
desertlion.info Dr Flip Stander's site with updates on desert lions
namibiaturism.com.na

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/142 for links to more content

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- At home with Namibia's Himba tribe – issue 125, Jan 12
- Sossusvlei – issue 110, Mar 10
- Bushmanland: north-east Namibia – issue 83, Nov 06

PLANNING GUIDES

- Namibia guide

THE TRIP

The author travelled with the community-owned **Kunene Conservancy Safaris** (kcs-namibia.com.na). A six-night *Kunene Wildlife & Culture* tour from Swakopmund or Windhoek costs from N\$23,990pp (around £1,450, flights not included). Mountain biking was arranged through **NatureFriend Safaris** (naturefriendsafaris.com).

If booking a trip with another tour operator (or lodge/camp), do ask if any of your money goes to the community conservancies.

Getting there & around

There are **no direct flights** from the UK to Namibia. Air Namibia (0844 482 2317, www.airnamibia.aero) flies London-Windhoek via Frankfurt from £1,080 return.

South African Airways (0844 375 9680, flysaa.com) flies via Johannesburg (£780). Flight time is around 11 hours.

Self-driving is straightforward and on the left side of the road. A 2WD is fine, although you can do more in a 4WD (providing you are an experienced off-roader). Hire one from Windhoek International Airport or the capital (4WDs from £45 a day, excluding petrol). Distances are long and petrol stations are few.

To get the most out of your trip, get truly into the wilderness and track desert rhinos, elephants and lions, go with KCS as above, or through a **specialist tour company** such as Expert Africa (020 8232 9777, expertafrica.com).

Cost of travel

Namibia is generally good value. Safaris can be expensive due to the vast distances involved. A main course in a restaurant will cost N\$60-150 (£4-9). A glass of wine costs N\$15-20 (£1-1.50).

Where to stay

The author wild camped, with **KC Safaris** paying a fee to the appropriate conservancies.

Community owned/joint-venture accommodation can be found at namibiawildlifesafaris.com.

Grootberg Lodge (grootberg.com) is solely owned by the Khoadi-Hoas community, and is dramatically set on Etendeka Plateau. Rhinos have been relocated from Etosha NP. Doubles cost N\$2,350 (£142), half board; activities extra. Camping nearby costs N\$150 (£9) pppn.

Wilderness Safaris (wilderness-safaris.com) has several top-end lodges in the region, as a joint venture with the conservancies.

Food & drink

Namibians love meat! As well as the usual steak, lamb etc, game (oryx, springbok) is widely available. A **braai** is a traditional barbecue; **biltong** is a dried-meat snack. Vegetarianism isn't well understood but is getting easier. Good seafood and fish is found on the coast. Beers include Windhoek and Hansa. South African wines are common.

NAMIBIA HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 **Sossusvlei** Cracked pans surrounded by huge, iconic apricot-coloured sand dunes.
- 2 **Skeleton Coast** Drive for pounding waves, atmospheric fogs, fur seals and desert wildlife.
- 3 **Fish River Canyon** Huge (160km long) canyon, home to one of the world's greatest hikes.
- 4 **Cheetahs** For guaranteed sightings of the world's largest cheetah population, visit the AfriCat Foundation at Okonjima.
- 5 **Rock art** See ancient Bushman paintings and engravings at Brandberg Mountain or Twyfelfontein.
- 6 **Etosha NP** Watch elephant, black rhino and more at night at the flood-lit waterholes – a unique experience.
- 7 **Himba & Herero** The clay-coated Himba are found in north west Namibia. Herero women can be seen wearing voluminous Victorian-style clothing and distinctive head-dresses.



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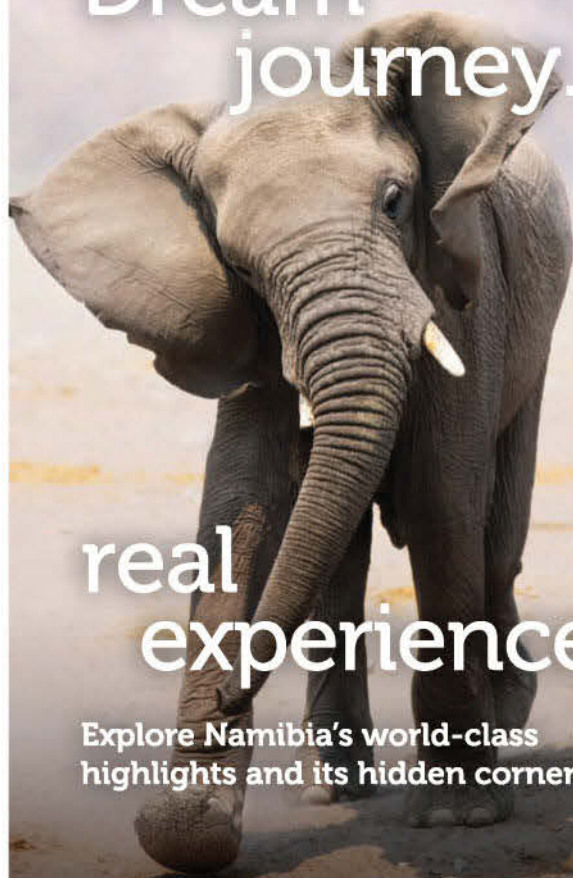


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Yoo Kittirungruang
CEO South East Asia

Lives in: Bangkok, Thailand
Travel Song: 'It's My Life', Bon Jovi

Past traveller Facebook friends: Over 700

Q What's your best travel photograph?
"Me in the UK with 15 of my past travellers who came to visit me in London while I was on holiday. This picture came purely from friendship. Many of the people who travelled with me have returned to visit me in Bangkok again. I have visited my new friends in Canada and the UK and one of my dreams is to meet them all again!"



Craig Mace
CEO Australia

Food you must try on Craig's tour: Kangaroo

Next holiday destination: Thailand

Loves being a CEO because: "Of the people you meet along the way"

Q Which sense comes alive when you travel?

"I think smell. The smell of a cold morning, the food, the farm stay, the boat with 20 people on it, my bag after two weeks on the road, horseriding, the smell of wet suits when we go surfing (and if you have ever been to Byron Bay you know what that smells like!)"



Susi Stace
CEO Central America

Originally from: Surrey, England

A must try on Susi's tour:

Chapulines – crispy chilli fried grasshoppers from Oaxaca, Mexico. Delicious!

Inspired to travel by: "The unexpected and not knowing what will come next"

Q Why do you love your job?

"Because it's the best job ever! I get to go to some of the most beautiful places in the world every day. I watch the people in my groups experiencing these things for the first time in their lives. I see them pushing themselves in unfamiliar and sometimes bizarre situations and achieving their goals and dreams, be it snorkelling with nurse sharks; climbing a Mayan Pyramid in the depths of the jungle; caving; enjoying the Guatemalan chicken buses; rafting or zip-lining through the cloud forest."

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Bowling
CEO Thailand

Inspired to travel by: Learning
Travel Song: 'Freedom' by

George Michael

Past traveller Facebook friends: Over 500

Q What's the best feedback you've had from a traveller?

"The best feedback is when a traveller connects

with me through social media and becomes a friend. I had a chance to come to England recently and some of my new friends came a long way just to reconnect and tell me again that our tour was the best ever! There is no greater feedback than friendship."



Stephen Akehurst
CEO Eastern Europe

Favourite Trip: The Best of Eastern Europe (EABE)

Inspired by: Other travellers

Loves being a CEO because: "We're building a worldwide community one trip at a time"

Q What makes you a CEO and not a tour guide?

"What really sets a G Adventures trip apart is the feeling of independence that we give to our travellers. As a CEO I'm as much a part of the experience as the activities, journeys and places we stay on tour. We lead but not in the normal way. Having a CEO is more like going on holiday with a good friend who wants to have great fun but who also happens to hold the tickets, timetables and maps to keep the cogs turning."



Julio Risco
CEO South America


Inspired to travel by: His brother
A must try on Julio's tour: Pisco

Sour... homemade of course!

Recommended Trip: Southern Divide (SMS)

Q Name one thing a traveller will do on your tour that they can't do otherwise?

"When we travel through the remote mountains between Cusco and Puno, we often see kids in uniform walking to school. On my tours we will always create room in our van and make the day for these kids by giving them a ride to school – instead of walking for two hours we drive them in only 15 minutes! It becomes a memory for both my travellers and the local people. A short 15-minute ride and we have changed their lives."



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WHERE: Salisbury Plain, on the South Atlantic isle of South Georgia, is one of the world's best places to get up-close to kings (*pictured*) – around 500,000 of these handsome penguins waddle here, which is why it's a stop-off for many longer Antarctic expedition cruises. Otherwise, various species can be seen across the Antarctic Peninsula: for example, Hope Bay has a large colony of Adélies while Port Lockroy is good for gentoos. All cruises to the White Continent will doubtless feature plenty of penguin action; excursions such as kayaking and overnighting in tents on the ice offer different encounters.

NEED TO KNOW: Penguin activity varies by month – to see them courting, visit November-December; to see chicks, go December-February. ►

7 MEET PENGUINS IN ANTARCTICA



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8

WHY IT'LL CHANGE**YOUR LIFE:** People

do things on their travels that they'd never do at home – foreign soils seem to encourage us to push our boundaries.

Which is a great, confidence-boosting thing! Because if you've got the gumption to bungee jump in New Zealand or skydive over Hawaii, just think what else you might be able to do? Oh, and it's heart-thumping doolally-bonkers fun, too.

WHERE: New Zealand is the spiritual home of bungee, with Queenstown its capital; the subject comes up in traveller conversation so often here ("Have you bungyed? Will you bungy? Should I bungy!?!") that it almost feels mandatory to do one. Other eye-popping spots for the elastic-pinging escapade include Victoria Falls, Zambia, and South Africa's 216m high Bloukrans Bridge.

Tandem skydiving (no experience necessary) is arguably less scary and more fun. Jumping from higher up seems less life-threatening somehow, and you get much more time to enjoy the view. Try 'chuting over the Swiss Alps, the Namib Desert or, for the ultimate freefall, alongside Mount Everest.

NEED TO KNOW: Depending on the height of the jump, a skydive will involve 30-60 seconds of freefall, followed by five or so minutes of floating under the parachute.



Alamy, Dreamstime



9

Take a road trip*Just you, a tank of petrol and an
open opportunity for adventure*

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE: Imagine piling everything you've got into the boot of your car and just heading wherever the mood takes you, not giving a stuff if there's traffic ahead or worrying that you'll be back in time for tea. To journey on the open road is to taste real freedom – you learn to throw caution to the wind, get off-the-beaten path and stumble across places you never even knew existed.

WHERE: The beauty of a road trip is that you can go almost anywhere. From epic coast-to-coast journeys in the USA to winding your way through Eastern Europe,

the possibilities are endless. As long as you have a reliable vehicle and plenty of adventurous spirit thrown in too, the world really is your oyster. Classic routes include the Pacific Coast Highway on America's West Coast; South Africa's picturesque Garden Route, full of lush vineyards and rocky shores; and Ruta 40 in Argentina, one of the longest roads in the Americas.

NEED TO KNOW: Always check the road traffic rules for countries that you'll be driving through – laws vary greatly from country to country and you may also need to obtain a specific permit such as an International Driving Permit or a Carnet de Passage. Check www.gov.uk/driving-abroad for more information. ►

A person is sitting in a traditional wooden canoe on a calm river. The person is wearing traditional attire, including a headband made of leaves and a necklace. The background is a dense, lush green forest with various trees and foliage. The water is still, reflecting the surrounding greenery.

10

GO OFF GRID

Three top snappers from *Wanderlust's* Travel Photo of the Year 2012 competition won a trip of a lifetime to Papua New Guinea – here are the incredible results...

PHOTOGRAPHS **DEBORAH DUNDERDALE, STEPHEN WALFORD, KYAW KYAW WINN**



"Papua New Guinea in one word? 'Unique'. It's unlike anywhere else I've ever been."

Stephen Walford, Travel Photo Of The Year 2012, Icon category runner-up

Papua New Guinea is truly a land apart. Though about the same size as Sweden, it's home to an estimated 820 different language-cultures. It has gas and gold wealth, yet 85% of the population still live lives of rural subsistence. It's a stone's throw from much-visited Australia, yet remains one of travel's final frontiers.

Geography plays a big part in this. The country – a group of more than 600 islands including the eastern half of New Guinea – is rugged in the extreme. Puckered into inaccessible mountains, which are cloaked by impenetrable jungle, getting around is a challenge. Despite having an area of 462,840 sq km, PNG has just 3,000km of paved road. Which makes a trip here all the more of an adventure.

Culture shock

So travel in PNG can be a challenge – but one that's worth rising to. Largely because the country's cultural diversity is unmatched, not to mention endlessly photogenic.

Head to the Highlands and you'll meet the Huli Wigmen, warriors with yellow-painted faces, quill-pierced nostrils and elaborate wigs threaded with feathers.

Then there's the ghostly Asaro Mudmen, with their clay-caked bodies and over-sized helmets; the Omo Masalai, who paint their bodies like ghoulish skeletons; and the Baining, who don magnificent masks before hot-footing across glowing coals.

Many of these tribes gather in the misty hills to perform traditional *singsings* – celebratory songs and dances that are most flamboyantly displayed at annual gatherings such as the Mt Hagen or Goroka Cultural Shows.

Brilliant birds

Incredibly, PNG's birds are even more dazzling than its tribes. The country is home to 708 bird species, including 38 birds-of-paradise, which are outlandishly good-looking or completely bonkers. Take the raggiana – the national bird of PNG – which stages the most extravagant courtship rituals, or the ribbon-tailed astrapia, whose elegant white tail feathers can grow over 1 metre long.

There are many brilliant birding spots, from the leafy highlands to the pristine coast. Ambua Lodge, near Tari, is an excellent base while from Karawari Lodge you can take boat tours to see the Sepik's endemic species.

Awesome adventures

Keen trekkers should hit the historic Kokoda Track, a 96km hike following in the footsteps of Second World War soldiers through tough jungle terrain. The

Highlands are also full of trails, including an ascent of 4,509m Mt Wilhelm.

On the coast, there's something for everyone. PNG's crystal-clear waters can claim some of the best snorkelling and diving in the world. Kimbe Bay offers vivid corals, Kavieng is known for its pelagic fish, hammerheads school at Tufi while you can float over shipwrecks near Rabaul.

Surfers will also be in heaven – there are great waves and breaks year-round at spots such as Vanimo and Milne Bay. Or you could just flop onto the white sand and relax...

In the frame

Of course, the reason for all this PNG talk is that it was the prize destination of *Wanderlust's* 2012 Travel Photo of the Year competition. It's perhaps the most extreme and exciting destination we've ever sent our winners to: they had to capture shots in tough conditions, where humidity muddles equipment and thick forest obscures the view. But they returned triumphant, with incredible portfolios and gushing praise for this distinct, remarkable nation.

"It's an untamed paradise," sums up Deborah Dunderdale, winner of the Wildlife category. "The landscape is still wild; the beaches have beautiful clean sand that melts into tropical forest. When there is a road, there are few cars on it. There are species still being discovered. Yes, it was out of my comfort zone, but it was all the more amazing for it." 📷

Meet the photographers



DEBORAH DUNDERDALE

Wildlife category winner

"I was shocked when I saw I'd won the Wildlife category. I originally

thought there was a mistake when I saw my picture as the winning shot – I thought they were rotating through all the finalists – but then I realised I'd won. I still can't really believe it!

"My favourite image of the trip is an image of a tribesman from Tokua Village. It's a simple one with him set against a dark background – for me it just captures his spirit. As we all stood taking photos with our modern technology he just stood there with a face that had seen so many changes in his country during his lifetime."



STEPHEN WALFORD

Icon category runner-up

"Papua New Guinea was completely different to other

places I've photographed. All the locals wanted their photo taken and showing them the result on the display provided endless entertainment! I've found on trips to other parts of the world that people would always ask for money when taking their photo, but this doesn't happen in PNG.

"The landscape was also astonishing – being so undeveloped it felt like you'd stepped back in time, especially on the coast. There were no roads, the locals generally used traditional wooden canoes to get around and this created fantastic pictures."



KYAW KYAW WINN

People category winner and Landscape category runner up

"I live in Myanmar so it's very

difficult for me to participate in European photo competitions. The Travel Photo of the Year competition is a great change for me because I can participate without needing to pay expensive entry fees. When I found out I had won two prizes in the competition, I couldn't believe it! I thought I was dreaming.

"The highlight of the trip for me was the amazing and wonderful culture, beautiful seascapes, local people and the many different tribes – I am very interested in their lifestyle."

For full interviews with our photographers see www.wanderlust.co.uk/142



Previous page

At Jebo Waterfall near Tufi, the winners were greeted in a traditional way by a wooden dugout canoe. They were then led into the area by the waterfall where more locals had climbed up the cliff face and greeted them by dancing and singing.

Clockwise from top left

A villager in Mount Hagen Market, Western Highlands; A cuscus in Tufi, Oro Province – these shy marsupials are a local delicacy; a villager with his drum in Maclaren Harbour, Oro Province; the boat journey up the river to Maclaren Harbour was led by Peter on the front paddle (in the photo), and his father on the back paddle. They live a few hours up the coast from this location and they paddle the whole way on the open sea. The boats are also used for fishing, with any fish caught being stored in the dugout part of the boat to keep them from escaping. The winners had to make sure they didn't move around too much or the boat could have capsized – taking all the camera gear with it; PNG is a haven for many spectacular butterflies, such as this one shot in Maclaren Harbour; a villager at Maclaren Harbour demonstrates how to wrap up sago – a starchy staple extracted from the pith of palm stems – for storage (which can be kept for two months).



MEET THE VIBRANT
CLANS OF THE
TUFU LOWLANDS.

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Dr Jonathan Morris, General Manager at Reef & Rainforest

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Katie, Travel Designer



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Culture and coast
(clockwise from this)
Local children from Bawame Village, Oro Province, who wanted to show off their boat. The villagers watching from top of the cliff then called to the kids to jump in – it didn't take much encouragement; villagers dressed for a singsing in Paiya Village; villager posing on his dugout at Maclaren Harbour; in the Western Highlands, one of the young men in the village was always watching what the winners were taking photos of. At one point, he had a mobile phone camera pointed at them when their backs were turned. Spotted, he quickly slipped it into his traditional dress!


IN FOCUS

"The highlight of the trip was the wonderful culture, beautiful seascapes and the many different tribes – the villagers were very friendly and happy for me to shoot photos of them."

Kyaw Kyaw Winn

'On the coast, there's something for everyone – PNG's crystal-clear waters claim some of the world's best snorkelling, vivid corals and pelagic fish, while surfers will be in heaven'



A close-up portrait of a Papua New Guinean man, likely from the Western Highlands, dressed for a traditional singing ceremony. He has intricate face paint: a white base with red and blue stripes around the eyes and mouth, and a red nose. He wears a colorful headband with a large, elaborate headdress of red, orange, and white feathers. A thick necklace of white and yellow cowrie shells is draped around his neck. The background is blurred green foliage.

**‘Papua New Guinea’s cultural diversity
is unmatched, not to mention
endlessly photogenic’**

Flocking together
Villagers dressed for
a *singing* in Paiya
Village, Western
Highlands. Their
headdresses display
a wild variety of birds
of paradise feathers,
which are handed
down generation
to generation

IN FOCUS

"Nem Village was definitely a highlight. We were greeted by the village elder, Andrew Rumunts. He was a character and loved posing for us and had a great sense of humour."

Stephen Walford





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IN FOCUS

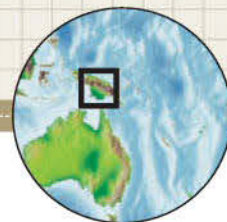
"My highlight was going down a fjord in the Tufi region on a raft through the mangroves to a beautiful area full of Sago plants, butterflies, some of which are 30cm across"
Deborah Dunderdale



Clockwise from top left

The mudmen of Pogle Village. The mudmen came to be around the 1950s when a small village were removed from their land by a larger group of villagers. To get their land back, they created the mudmen – the larger group thought the mudmen were spirits of ancestors and decided to leave the land; the view from Tufi Resort, Oro Province, of the fjords and the mountains in the distance. This area was created by lava flowing from a volcano and hitting the sea; in Maclaren Harbour, the local villagers demonstrating various aspects of their life – making fire and sago bread, tattooing. They made a large fire to cook the sago, making fire from rubbing wood together – the locals could do it in seconds; the locals at Komoo Beach, Oro Province, live just behind the beach. These children were playing near one of their village boats and were intrigued by a winner's camera – they then asked why they put the camera to his face to take a photo, one of the kids then put his eye, both closed, to the viewfinder and couldn't understand what the winner was doing differently; up in the Western Highlands, the chief of Nem Village, Andrew Rumunts, poses with his bow and arrow.





Papua New Guinea Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Port Moresby
Population: 7 million
Language: Tok Pisin (pidgin), English
Time: GMT+10
International dialling code: +675
Visas: Required by UK nationals. It's slightly cheaper to buy the 60-day tourist visa in advance from the PNG High Commission in London (pnghighcomm.org.uk).
Money: Kina (PGK), around PGK4 to the UK£. Small bills are essential for rural travel. AUS\$ widely accepted.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- **Wet season** Expect cyclones and flooding from tropical storms
- **Drier and less humid;** temps 24-30°C (15°C in the Highlands)
- **Shoulder months;** expect anything

Health & safety

Roads are bad, motor accidents common. Tribal fighting flares up in the Highlands. Malaria is a serious risk, as is HIV, TB, typhoid and cholera. Seek medical advice before travelling.

Further info

PNG & Solomon Islands (LP, 2012)
www.papuanewguinea.travel

More Online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/142 for links to more content

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- **First 24 hours in Port Moresby** – issue 134, March 13
- **Welcome to PNG** – issue 129, Jun 12
- **Tribal living in PNG** – issue 91, Nov 07

PLANNING GUIDES

- **Papua New Guinea guide**

THE TRIP

The photographers travelled courtesy of the **Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority** (www.papuanewguinea.travel). They stayed at the **Rondon Ridge** at Mount Hagan, (pngtours.com; doubles from US\$633 [£400] – rate includes tours, guides, transfers and meals), the **Tufi Dive Resort** (tufidive.com; doubles from AUD\$140 [£83]; 'overnight village guesthouse' doubles from AUD\$80 [£48])

Getting there

No direct UK-PNG flights. **Singapore Airlines** (singaporeair.com) flies London-Singapore from around £880 return. From Singapore, **Air Niugini** (airniugini.com.pg) flies to Port Moresby from around £735 return. Flight time is around 23 hours. Alternatively, fly to Australia – flights depart more frequently from Queensland to Port Moresby.

Getting around

PNG has an expensive internal flight network. Operators include **Air Niugini** (airniugini.com.pg), **Airlines**

PNG (apng.com). **Flight Directors** (flightdirectors.com) can book these. Chartering a vehicle is expensive. Few foreigners use local transport (called PMVs; usually open-sided trucks or minivans). Travel around the Sepik region is by dugout or dinghy.

Cost of travel

PNG is **expensive**. Rooms in standard hotels can start at £100; the few high-end properties and ecolodges cost £300-plus a night. Most meals are eaten in hotel restaurants where mains cost £15-20; a soft drink costs around £1, beers around £2.50. Cheap options include roadside **kais** – fried food takeaways.

Accommodation

Resorts, top-end and mid-range hotels are the norm. At the budget end, there are a number of **religious mission guesthouses**, community-run hostels and private guesthouses. For an authentic experience, ask around about accommodation in village houses.

Food & drink

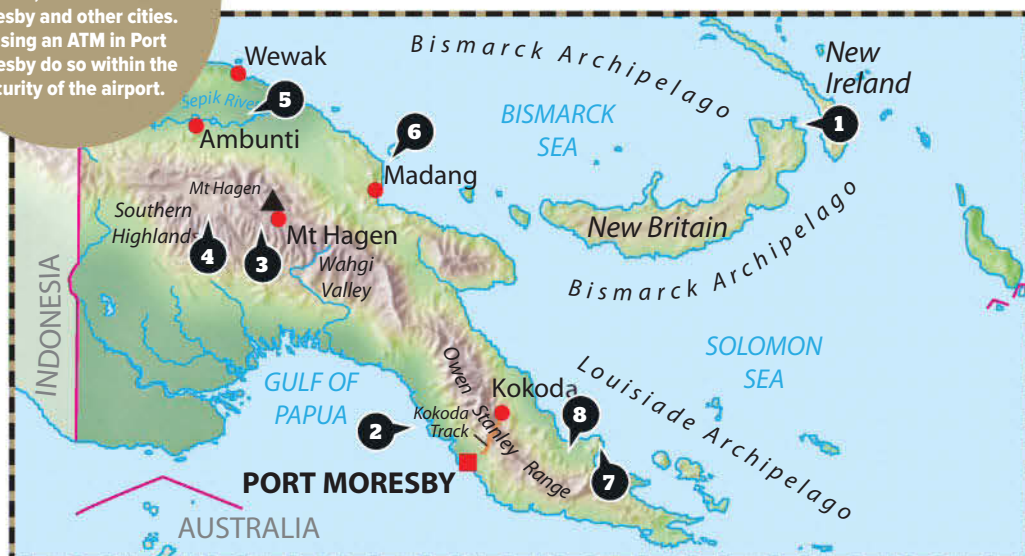
Outside city restaurants, meat is rarely eaten. Staples include **sago** and **kau kau** (sweet potato). Dessert might be bananas, papaya, and pineapple. **Kulau** (young coconut milk), drunk from the nut, is widespread. The local beer is SP.

PNG HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Rabaul** This city on PNG's New Britain Island is surrounded by smouldering volcanoes, war history and super subaqua sites.
- 2 Kokoda Track** Crossing over the Owen Stanley Mountains, this tough 96km trek was brutally fought over by the Japanese and Australian armies in 1942.
- 3 Mount Hagen** Meet the Mudmen and other Highland tribes. Time your visit for the annual Cultural Show (August).
- 4 Tari** Watch the Huli Wigmen and venture into Tari Basin for excellent birding.
- 5 Sepik River** Travel by canoe to visit the traditional villages, *haus tambaran* spirit houses and dense rainforest of this remote river region
- 6 Madang** This area boasts white-sand beaches fringed by palms, and world-class snorkelling.
- 7 Tufi** Glorious beaches and excellent diving.
- 8 Managalas** A heavenly region of rainforested plateau in Oro Province. Stay with the Ese people and take safaris to find the world's largest butterfly, the Queen Alexandra Birdwing.

NEED TO KNOW

There's a real threat of robbery and theft; take care in Port Moresby and other cities. If using an ATM in Port Moresby do so within the security of the airport.





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Over the years, Intrepid have created several styles of trips to cater to a diverse range of travellers. Their *Basix* style is ideal for budget travellers, offering great value and the flexibility to choose the activities that you really want to do.

For those looking for the classic Intrepid adventure, the *Original* is the perfect balance between free time to explore at your own pace, and included activities that help you experience things you wouldn't be able to on your own. If you're after a little more luxury, Intrepid's *Comfort* style trips offer a higher standard of accommodation and more included activities.

Giving something back

But Intrepid's grassroots style of travel also ensures the impact on the communities they visit is minimised. They use local leaders, local accommodation and local transport and support local community projects, ensuring sustainability and responsible tourism is at the centre of everything they do. So far Intrepid have aided

disabled children in China and Tibet, child protection shelters in Mongolia and women's rights in Timor, to name just a few projects.

As a global company, Intrepid attracts travellers from all over the world and from all walks of life, united by a passion for a unique, authentic experience. So when you choose to travel with them you know you'll be sharing the trip with like-minded souls ready to have the adventure of a lifetime.

Celebrating 25 years

Much like *Wanderlust*, this year sees Intrepid celebrating a big anniversary – 25-years of operating inspiring trips. Founded by Darrell and Manch after organising a trip with their friends across Africa in a truck they bought themselves (pictured left), the company's dedication to finding new travel frontiers shows no signs of fading. New sailing itineraries in Burma and the Caribbean have been created along with food adventures in Peru and Cambodia and inspiring trekking trips in Morocco and Nepal. Here's to another 25 years of travel inspiration!



Go online to order a new 2014 brochure now: www.intrepidtravel.com

◀ Volunteer

Give something back

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE:

According to the world's largest study of happiness, the characteristic most associated with

long-term increases in life satisfaction is commitment to an altruistic goal. Simply: help others, be happier yourself. And if you can do that in a land you've always wanted to visit, in a way that will truly benefit the local area, all the better.

WHERE: Worldwide – the key is that you're passionate and committed. You could pursue developmental volunteering (working with people) – teaching in Malawi; school building in Burma; assisting with admin at a Peruvian charity. Or you might prefer conservation volunteering, working with local experts to protect a natural environment or endangered species.

NEED TO KNOW: Do your research. Ask questions before signing up to ensure your project actually benefits the local community.



Travel alone

Be your own best travel companion



WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE:

Frightening, thrilling, empowering, liberating – travelling solo is all these things and more.

You'll learn a lot about yourself and your ability to step up to the mark, and you'll likely meet more people than if you were travelling in a group. The lows can be low, but the highs will be all the higher.

WHERE: Choose somewhere you feel safe (a solo woman might be uncomfortable travelling in the Middle East, for instance) and perhaps somewhere with an established traveller circuit. Good choices might be Australia, Thailand or Latin America's 'gringo trail'. Use travelling solo as a chance to do that thing you always wanted: join a small-group trek to Everest Base Camp; learn Spanish in a Guatemalan village; ride some of the world's great railways. No one else can stop you!

NEED TO KNOW: Anxious about evenings/eating alone? Try homestays or couchsurfing.



13 CLIMB TO THE ROOF OF A COUNTRY

*Feel literally and metaphorically
on top of the world*

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE:

Imagine: it's 6am, almost everyone back home's asleep and here you are, gasping and grinning and getting all emotional, standing on the summit of Africa. The sunrise view from the top of Kilimanjaro is far-reaching, but the sense of achievement is out of this world. You've battled thin air, steep slopes and the voice in your head telling you to stop, and you've BLOODY DONE IT! Few moments in travel feel this good, or stay with you for so long.

WHERE: Kilimanjaro in Tanzania is the obvious choice – at 5,895m, it's the world's highest trekking peak, meaning pretty much anyone can stand atop a continent, the perfect balance of achievability and challenge. Argentina's Anconcagua (6,960m) is a step up in both height and difficulty, but still not a technical climb. Australia's Mount Kosciuszko (2,228m) is a much easier option, and you still get to brag that you've conquered a continent. Of course, every country has a high point. Ticking them all off? Now that's a trip of a lifetime...

NEED TO KNOW: Altitude sickness commonly kicks in from around 3,000-3,500m. It affects people differently. Climb slowly to allow of acclimatisation and stay well hydrated. ►

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14 EYEBALL A GORILLA

*Meet one of mankind's
closest relatives*

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE: Spending an hour in the company of a mountain gorilla is one of the planet's genuinely unique experiences. You're not actually supposed to eyeball them (the pre-trek briefing instructs you not to stare) but just being close, in the same patch of wild forest, is an unforgettable privilege indeed. It's not just a wildlife encounter, it's an anthropological thunderbolt: it feels like gazing at one of the family.

WHERE: The best places to track mountain gorillas are Mgahinga Gorilla NP and Bwindi Impenetrable NP in Uganda and Volcanoes NP in Rwanda. The experience varies: you might have a long, sweaty strenuous hike on your hands if the primates are being elusive; you might find them within 30 minutes. Either way, it will be one of the best days of your life.

NEED TO KNOW: Permits are mandatory and prices vary by country: Uganda – \$500; Rwanda – \$750; Democratic Republic of Congo – \$400. ►



◀ Wild camp *Spend the night in the great outdoors*

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR

LIFE: Connect with nature by bedding down beyond the confines of campsites or creature comforts. At night, even familiar places take on alien aspects, and unfamiliar ones feel like other planets, abandoned to just you and a million stars.

WHERE: Wild camping isn't technically legal everywhere, though if you're

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considerate and obey some basic rules, it's generally tolerated. Good spots, where it's officially permitted, include Scotland, Dartmoor and Scandinavia. Some places seem simply made for wilderness sleeping. For instance, unroll a swag in the Australian bush to kip by a crackling fire under the vastest of skies, or pitch a tent alongside Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni to see the moon glint off the blisteringly white salt flats and be first to watch them sparkle under the rising sun.

NEED TO KNOW: Pick a site well away from private property. Minimise disruption by arriving late and leaving early. Leave no trace.

Be mesmerised by the sky's greatest spectacle

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE:

Pure magic – that's what the aurora is. If travelling to one of the most pristine, snow-sparkled places on the planet to watch the sky dance doesn't bring a tear to your eye or a gasp to your lips, then nothing will.

WHERE: You need to head to remote areas of the far north between mid-September and April. Good spots include Arctic Scandinavia, Finland, Norway, Iceland, northern Canada and Alaska. Abisko in Sweden, has some of the clearest skies and best aurora-viewing in the world.

NEED TO KNOW: Many regions issue aurora forecasts, which predict the likely occurrence and strength of any displays; for example, see www.gi.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast.

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CHASE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS





17 TRAVEL OVERLAND

Take a long, slow look at the world

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE: Travelling overland – be it by 4WD truck, on two wheels or on foot – not only enables you to take a longer, closer look at your destination, but also a long hard look at yourself. Whether you're coping in a confined space with a bunch of strangers or dealing with your own company and hardships, you'll never have more opportunity to search your own soul.

WHERE: Absolutely anywhere. Those unwilling to go solo should look to the tour operators offering long-distance truck tours: think Cairo-Cape Town or Istanbul-Beijing. Or you could cycle to Australia from your own front door, walk around Europe's edge or drive a tuk-tuk from Islington to India. The only limits are time and imagination.

NEED TO KNOW: Check visa requirements if crossing multiple borders; some countries require you to buy visas in advance, others you can buy on arrival.

Working abroad

Earn on the hoof, pay as you go

WHY IT'LL CHANGE YOUR LIFE: Moving to work in another country is exhilarating, challenging and one of the biggest lifestyle changes you can make. Taking up employment abroad is a fantastic way to immerse yourself in a country in ways that travelling as a visitor can't – not only do you get a greater interaction with the people and a real sense of belonging, it's a great way to earn some money as you travel.

Whether you choose to stick to your current career path or take the plunge and try something new, you'll learn heaps of new skills and meet plenty of new people. At times it can be scary, especially if you don't speak the language or you're struggling to find work, but the benefits

of living as an insider and seeing a country through a different perspective far outweigh the negatives.

WHERE: If you're a UK citizen you have the right to work in any country in the European Economic Area (EEA) without

a work permit. This also includes Norway, Lichtenstein and Iceland.

If you want to work in a non-EU country you'll need to have a work permit. In most cases you need a job offer first, but some countries – including

Canada and New Zealand – do offer specialist visas for those within

a certain age group, usually 18-30 or 18-35. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is another option; it can take you just about anywhere and, contrary to popular belief, is not just for gap-year students.

NEED TO KNOW: Make sure you're armed with plenty of knowledge when it comes to visas, work permits, health insurance and tax. Check the relevant country's immigration website. ►

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TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

Become an instant expert
with our travel know-how



**New Zealand's
Great Walks**
see p89

■ **This month's experts include:** Composition magician Steve Davey, p94 ♦
Straight-talking Dr Jane, p92 ♦ Successful sabbatical-taker Rebecca Franks, p86
♦ Prague insider Martin Stejskal, p90 ♦ Daypack destroyer Phoebe Smith, p97



Sky's the limit
The options for your sabbatical are almost endless – Himalaya climb, anyone?

■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

Could you take a sabbatical?

What can you do when that two-week holiday just doesn't cut the mustard? When you're stuck in a rut and need something big to re-energise your life, but don't fancy quitting your job, selling your possessions and moving to an ashram?

Maybe it's time for a sabbatical: an extended period away from your job and everyday life, perhaps to explore the world. It may sound like a pipe dream, but it's easier than you think and potentially one of the most enriching travel experiences to boot.

What is it?

A sabbatical is an agreed, usually unpaid (unless you're lucky) amount of time off work, lasting anything from a month to a year or more. The word derives from 'of the sabbath': a rest from work. However, these days there's little relaxation involved – many people use sabbaticals to volunteer overseas, learn a new language, hike a long-distance trail or myriad other epic experiences that are hard to squeeze into a standard holiday allowance.

Where do I start?

First you need to find out if the company you work for has a sabbatical policy. There are no

laws forcing companies to offer sabbaticals, although a growing number do, recognising that they can help increase staff retention and help avoid employee burn-out.

If your company does have a policy, there will probably be provisos. You will certainly need to have worked for them for a specified time. There may be a limit to how long your break can be; your pension and salary will likely be frozen; you may be banned from doing paid work for anyone else while away. If you don't qualify, or agree with the terms, you may have to wait – or resign.

If your workplace doesn't have a specific sabbatical policy, you can still raise the idea.

Perhaps mention it casually at first, to gauge reaction. If you want to make a formal request, arrange a meeting with your boss, armed with a strong case. You need to think about what you want to get out of the experience and what you will achieve, because you need to convince the boss that taking time off will benefit both you *and* the company. Perhaps start with the fact that it can cost around £8,000 to recruit a new member of staff! But also stress how your break will teach you new skills; how it will invigorate your colleagues, who may have to step up in your absence; and how you will return with fresh ideas and motivation. The more you can show how good it will be for you personally *and* professionally, the more likely it is you'll be granted the time away.

Taking a sabbatical isn't risk-free – you could still be made redundant while you're away and your pension contributions could be affected. If possible get some kind of job assurance down in writing before you go.

What should I do?

Deciding what to do on your sabbatical is the fun part: the possibilities are almost endless. You could teach English in Japan, learn to cook in Tuscany, build a school in Mozambique, unicycle across France. If you have a passion, or an 'I've always wanted to...', now is the time to indulge it.

That said, consider how it will appear to your employer and on your CV. Three months spent drinking cocktails on the beach in Thailand is less likely to convince a sceptical boss than the same period spent helping conserve coral reefs. You may even want to consider doing something that will directly enhance your career; for example, will becoming proficient in Chinese get you a promotion when you return?

So, get planning. "I did quite a bit of research," says Rebecca Franks, who took a three-month sabbatical from her job in Bristol. "There were so many different things I wanted to do that narrowing it down took a lot of (very enjoyable) research – looking at maps, magazines and pictures, and talking to lots of people about places they'd been. Once I'd decided to go to Florence for a month to learn Italian, and then to Africa to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, the logistical planning seemed easy."

If you're planning to take school-age children, there are extra considerations. You could choose to travel during the summer

holidays, put the kids into a foreign school for a term or take on the challenge of home-schooling them.

What about money?

Finances are a key aspect of planning a sabbatical. Can you afford not to be paid for months?

You'll need money not only to fund your adventure but to cover continuing at-home expenses. Or can you take a mortgage holiday or rent out your home?

Go through everything. How much do you have saved? How much do you need? Think about how much you'll spend while you're away (which will vary greatly depending on the destinations and activities you choose), and set a daily budget, factoring in extra for emergencies. Be prepared to live frugally before you go, to bolster your savings.

Note, some companies won't let you return from a sabbatical earlier than the date you've agreed – don't assume that, if you run out of money, you can automatically go straight back to your job.

What will I achieve?

Taking a break, doing something new and gaining a different perspective can have a profound effect. TV producer Petra Shepherd took an active sabbatical in South America, and found it was a chance to alter her lifestyle: "My job was very social with lots of parties and events – and lots of food and alcohol. The sabbatical was a detox of both

'Be prepared to live frugally before you go, to bolster your savings'

mind and body! I did lots of treks, giving me time to reflect, and get fit too."

For CEO Tilly Boulter, who took a sabbatical with her two children, it changed her career path: "I'm about to leave the publishing company I run with my business partner to set up a company running children's nurseries."

It might just be a welcome boost. Rebecca Franks says, "I came back to work with more energy and enthusiasm, with fresh ambition and confidence, and wider horizons."

Seeing the world away from your desk can recharge your life in myriad ways. It might inject life into your old career, or even inspire a new one.

■ Case study

REBECCA FRANKS



Why did you decide to take a sabbatical?

I love to travel so when the chance to take a three-month sabbatical

[learning Italian and climbing Kilimanjaro] came up after five years in my job, it seemed too good to ignore.

There wasn't a specific reason; the timing just seemed right for a break.

What were the biggest challenges?

The thought of climbing Kili was pretty daunting. Buying all the kit I needed was a mammoth task as well. My last month in work was hectic, but they were really supportive of what was I doing, which made everything easier.

What did you get out of it?

Great memories, new friends, a new language (well, a few words!), time away to think, a new-found love of Africa – and lots of photos. And I was so chuffed to make it to the top of Kilimanjaro. I'll never forget walking on the snowy summit at sunrise.

What were you hoping to achieve?

I hoped to do something completely different from everyday life, to learn something new, to see more of the world and to have an adventure.

How did you feel when you returned to work – was it difficult?

More strange than difficult. Three months can slip by quite uneventfully at work, whereas it felt like so many new and unexpected things had happened in my three months away.

Would you do it again?

Yes, in the right circumstances. It was really valuable both personally and professionally but it might have been harder if my work hadn't been happy for me to come back to my job.

What tips would you give others?

Do it! Decide what you want to get out of your time off – I wanted to learn something and do something challenging – and then prepare. If everything's in place before you go, there's more time to enjoy it when you're there. That said, the feeling of freedom was part of the joy. 📸



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Top tramps

The Milford Track is just one of New Zealand's Great Walks



■ Instant Expert

New Zealand's Great Walks

TOP TIP

The best time to tramp in New Zealand is from late November to April, when the weather is better. From May to October, tracks may be impassable or dangerously slippery due to snow.

So, why are we talking about wandering around New Zealand?

The Milford Track turned 125 in November. Though the Maori had been hunting hereabouts for years, it was in 1888 that the first proper path to South Island's Milford Sound was created, crossing Mackinnon Pass and opening up easier access to the fine fiord.

And the Milford Track is a 'great walk'?

No, not a 'great walk', a Great Walk – uppercase. New Zealand has heaps of top tramps, but nine of them have been designated officially 'Great'.

Why's that then?

The nine in question, all managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC), are 'premier tracks that pass through diverse and spectacular scenery'. They are the best maintained routes, and between them showcase the full variety of NZ's wild places.

And they are...?

As well as Milford, there's the shore-hugging trail around Lake Waikaremoana (46km);

the Tongariro Northern Circuit (43km); the Abel Tasman Coast Track (55km); the west coast Heaphy Track (78km); the Kepler Track (60km); the Routeburn Track across the Southern Alps (32km); and Stewart Island's Rakiura Track (32km).

Hang on, that's eight...

OK, the ninth is the Whanganui Journey (145km) – bit of a cheat, as it's a river canoe-paddle rather than a walk. But still Great.

Fine. Are trips on these trails hard to arrange?

No permits are necessary, planning information is easy to find (see greatwalks.co.nz) and you can travel independently or on a guided trip. The trails are popular though, so you need to pre-book. For instance, camping isn't permitted along the Milford Track; you must stay in the three DOC huts en route, which have limited capacity. However, such measures are in place to help keep the trails less crowded, so it's all good.

Great!

■ 5-step guide to...

BEING A TOUR LEADER

1 You need to love travel

You'll likely have explored offbeat places and done a long trip or two. You'll have personal experience of delays, dysentery, hawkers and hoodwinks, and so will be unfazed by the world's rich tapestry.

2 You need to love people

It's *all* about the people. You need to be able to communicate with everyone, from travel bores and divas to the local mahout. You need to know when the group is flagging/hot/hungry and help even disparate characters to gel. Experience of a service industry, leading or teaching is helpful. A sense of humour is a must.

3 You must be calm in a crisis You need to be organised, but able to cope when things go wrong. You'll need to have plans, back-up plans and back-ups for the back-ups. You'll be able to deal with any complication, no matter how bizarre.

4 You should do your research Visit slide shows, travel exhibitions and industry lectures. Browse wanderlust.co.uk/travel-jobs. Go on a trip with the travel company you want to work for – it'll give a great insight, as you get to watch a real tour leader in action.

5 You should never think it's a jolly Tour leaders are first up, last to bed and on call 24/7, for absolutely anything. It's a rewarding job, but a paid holiday it is not.

Know a great tour leader?

Nominations are open for the 2014 *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards – go to worldguideawards.co.uk.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Prague festive markets, off-the-beaten track camel-trekking and the best way to shoot a husky (not *that* way)? Our experts provide answers to your travel queries

THE EXPERTS



PAUL GOODYER
MD of Nomad Travel Stores



DR JANE WILSON-HOWARTH
Wanderlust Health Expert



STEVE DAVEY
Wanderlust Photo Expert



MARTIN STEJSKEL
Author of *Secret Guides: Prague*

Q I'm going husky-sledding in Sweden – how can I capture the experience on camera?

Chris James, by email

A Snow tends to fool your camera meter into under-exposing, while the extra UV light can cause a blue cast on your pictures. If your camera has picture scene modes, then selecting the 'Snow' mode will help.

If not, you need to use +1 to +2 stops of exposure compensation to get the exposures right. Also use the 'Shade' or 'Cloudy' white balance setting to avoid colour casts.

Stylistically, shooting something like this can be tough: dogsleds are not that compatible with photography. If you want to stop to shoot your companions whizzing past, you will have a bunch of dogs to convince first. Last time I had to do this, I shot from a snowmobile, which wasn't as much fun!

Try to shoot with a wide-angle lens – this will allow you to photograph your sled and dog team as well as the landscape, giving exciting shots with a sense of place. If you can, mount the camera on yourself and shoot with a remote release – that way you avoid having to take one hand off the sled to shoot. You might also try shooting with a mini video

camera; consider a helmet-mounted model.

Steve Davey, Wanderlust's photography expert
(www.stevedavey.com)

Q I have always wanted to do a camel safari – not a touristy two hours around the pyramids but something a bit more 'wilderness'. Any ideas?

J Jones, by email

A Make your dromedary dreams come true and head to India. Real Deal Rajasthan Camel Safari (www.theidealrajashtancamelsafari.com) does exactly what it says on the tin: camel safaris in the Thar Desert, northern India.

You can choose a short trip on camel-back to watch the sun set over the desert, just outside Jaisalmer, or you could spend the night camping in the desert, complete with

campfire and dinner prepared by your local hosts. Longer safari options can be arranged too.

For something closer to the UK, you could plump for the Sahara near Merzouga in Morocco, or Wadi Rum in Jordan – both of which have plenty of companies offering overnight odysseys in the desert. For something a bit swankier, take a trip with Uluru

TOP TIP

Want to get your snowscape piccies whiter than white? Frosty landscapes reflect a lot of light, confusing your camera into underexposing – compensate for this by overexposing by around two stops.



Camel Tours (ulurucameltours.com.au) to watch the sun set or rise in Australia's Red Centre.

Clare Wilson, Wanderlust writer

Q What type of mosquito net should I buy and how do I hang it?

P Browning, by email

A Free-standing mosquito nets tend to be a bit bulky. It's best to buy a combination net, which can be hung in a variety of ways – adaptability is key to being able to use it in a range of situations. Also, buy a repellent-treated net – that way, if the net does fall and touch you, you'll still be protected. Note, treatments wear off: if the net is used regularly, retreat it at least once every three months.

If there's no convenient ceiling hook, don't fear! Almost every room

'The Christmas markets give the city a very special atmosphere, and visitors can browse among stands selling everything from gingerbread to carp'



Christmas under canvas
The gothic Tyn cathedral overlooks Prague Old Town's festive market

■ Insiders' Guide to...

ECUADOR



Adventure tour operator Exodus (exodus.co.uk) celebrates its 40th year in February. Exodus's Senior Marketing Executive, **Laura Gamble**, has just come back from Ecuador and gives us the latest on the country...

TO STAY: Hidden among the majestic Andes in Tungurahua province, Hacienda Leito is completely off the beaten track – surrounded by the silence of the mountains, it feels almost as if no other tourist has ever been here before. The hacienda is full of charm, each room has its own fireplace, and the staff are wonderful and welcoming – it's like a home from home.

TO EXPLORE: No trip to Ecuador is complete without a journey into the rainforest. Trekking through jungle with an indigenous guide, you see the incredible variety of wildlife, from tarantulas and enormous crickets to playful monkeys and beautiful birds.

TO RELAX: Ecuador is studded with hot springs, due to the geothermal activity of its many volcanoes. Those in Chachimiro are particularly special; nestled between fertile green hills, they offer a peaceful place to unwind after a long day of exploring.

TO TREK: Ecuador boasts a multitude of options for keen walkers – with its multiple ecosystems there's a lot of variety in terrain. My personal favourite was experiencing high altitude for the first time at Cuicocha crater lake – my head was literally in the clouds!

exodus
www.exodus.co.uk

has a window: move the bed under the window and use the frame as a fixing point. To fix your net, you need four cup hooks (which can be screwed into ceilings, branches etc), gaffer tape (for net repairs, and to stick it to the wall) and some thin paracord (for tying through the net eyelets to fixed objects).

If all else fails, put your bag on the bed behind your head, drape the net over it, and tuck the end under the mattress at your feet.

Paul Goodyer, MD of Nomad Travel Stores
(www.nomadtravel.co.uk)

Q I want to visit Prague this winter but I'm worried it'll be touristy. How do I find the secret spots and the least tacky Christmas markets and activities?

PM Hale, by email

A The end-of-year celebrations and many Christmas markets give Prague a very special atmosphere in wintertime. Visitors can browse dozens of stands, including those selling decorations, biscuits, gingerbread, a wide range of gifts and even the traditional Czech Christmas carp; the streets buzz with activity and warmth.

Each year on the evening of 30 November, the opening of the largest of the city's Christmas markets is marked by an official ceremony to turn on the lights of a splendid and beautifully decorated Christmas tree in the Old Town Square. This marks the beginning of the festivities, which will last throughout December.

Less well-known Christmas markets are also held in other squares: Havelské náměstí,

Náměstí Míru, Náměstí Republiky and Vystaviště Holešovice. These are definitely less touristy than the main market and are well worth a visit.

My recommended secret spot is the Museum of the Infant Jesus of Prague where a wax figure, known as the Infant Jesus of Prague, is kept in the church. It has many special robes, and it is dressed in different ones depending on the occasion.

I also enjoy the alchemical route I've described in my new guidebook, which leads from the Powder Gate in the East, down the Royal Way to the Castle. The route is full of alchemical symbols and stories; it includes a black Madonna, a green man, a thief's shrivelled hand and more!

Martin Stejskal, author, Secret Guides: Prague (Jonglez, £13.99)

Q I'm going on a long trip, which will take me through several developing countries – what's the best option for water purification?

Paul Restall, by email

A Boiling is the best way to kill viruses, bacteria, protozoa and worms. In most places it should be possible to acquire a cup or jug of boiling water, or you can boil up some tap-water on your own stove.

Carry some tincture of iodine as a back up. Put four drops of 2% or 3% iodine in a litre of water, shake and then leave for at least 20 minutes – longer if the water is cloudy. Adding a soluble vitamin C tablet before you drink it helps the water taste better.

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, Wanderlust's Health expert



TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



20 years in 10 diseases

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth has been *Wanderlust's* health guru for two decades. Here, she looks back at the biggest killers during the magazine's lifetime – and predicts what the future holds for the health of travellers

The past 20 years have seen a rise in information about global disease patterns. Travel health

boffins network more efficiently than ever so that expert advice is truly expert and can be properly targeted to each individual's specific needs. Public health doctors are more likely to be aware of any new outbreak promptly so that appropriate precautions can be put in place.

Meanwhile the plight of the world's poor improves little. Global citizens should consider that it is in their own interests to aid health improvements of the poor, since it is from an overcrowded slum that the next pandemic is likely to emerge.

So what have been the biggest killers of the past two decades? And what do the next 20 years hold? Here's a run down of the travel health 'top' ten.

+Malaria

No one is sure why – whether it is global warming, evolution of the disease, or even the fantastic efforts being made to control the mosquito vector – but malaria cases in Africa are falling, across the whole continent.

A vaccine is also being rolled out that, although not good enough to protect travellers from the disease, is preventing deaths in African children. Given that malaria is the third most important cause of premature deaths, this is good news. It also means that transmission to travellers is slightly less likely.

Prognosis: Sadly, we are a long way off the development of a vaccine.

+SARS

Ten years ago a new disease was unleashed on the world; it was

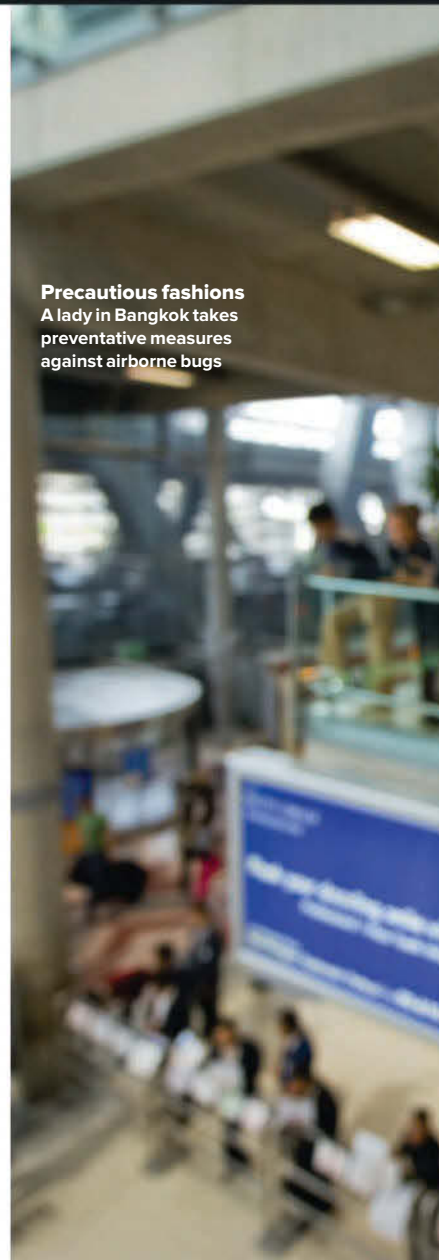
feared that it would take millions of lives globally. It was highly infectious, transferred from one person to another by way of droplets in the air. A few infected individuals were found to be 'super spreaders' of the disease, exhaling huge viral loads into the environment.

However, the disease didn't fulfil the gloomiest predictions, with prompt responses from public health agencies containing the pandemic – although there were over 8,000 people infected around the world with over 770 deaths. **Prognosis:** SARS seems to have become a thing of the past although some new viral strain is likely to emerge in future.

+Influenza

More people died in a year during 1918's Spanish (H1N1) flu pandemic than during the Great War. Scientists work hard to monitor rapidly evolving flu viruses and endeavour to protect us with immunisation against current strains.

Precautious fashions
A lady in Bangkok takes preventative measures against airborne bugs



We may be prepared, but there are lingering concerns that another disastrous pandemic will break out again before the appropriate vaccine can be developed. Influenza immunisation is wise for long-haul travel, although it has to be accessed annually, and the UK only stocks supplies from about October each winter. **Prognosis:** Flu viruses forever change and almost keep one step ahead of human intervention. However, vaccine manufacturers are also ever more sophisticated and soon there may be a jab that is more protective for longer.





'SARS seems to have become a thing of the past although some new viral strain is likely to emerge in future'

+Diarrhoeal diseases

These remain the second commonest cause of death in children, responsible for about 840,000 deaths in under fives throughout the world annually.

Travellers' diarrhoea is usually short-lived but a significant bout comes with about a 10% risk of irritable bowel syndrome, which can persist for years after the trip that caused it.

Diarrhoea is also a problem among non-travellers, causing trillions of dollars of lost work time and medical bills.

Prognosis: It's difficult to foresee a time when food hygiene the

world over will be perfect and/or a vaccine will be made that protects against the many and diverse diarrhoea microbes.

+Rotavirus

This year saw a vaccine against rotavirus become part of Britain's childhood immunisation programme. This is a welcome development, although this new vaccine is only effective in infants.

Globally, rotavirus is a common cause of diarrhoea and vomiting; most of us experience it once during the first five years of life. In Britain each year three or four people die of it; in crowded, resource-poor countries it

kills countless numbers.

Prognosis: Virologists are working towards developing a universal vaccine as rotavirus is commonly acquired by adults in hospitals and on cruise ships.

+Measles

In 1980 there were 2.6 million deaths attributed to measles; by 2011 the death count was down to 158,000, thanks to the MMR vaccination. However, in 1998, a flawed – eventually discredited – study caused a scare that made people wary of being immunised with the combined measles/mumps/rubella jab. As vaccine uptake dwindled, a serious outbreak of measles and mumps became inevitable. This started in south Wales last winter.

There has been one death from measles in Britain so far this year, and – sadly – there will be some long-term consequences among the thousands of children who have become infected.

Prognosis: The MMR vaccine is recommended for travellers.

+HIV/AIDS

This continues to be the scourge of Africa and has created a generation of orphans.

Prognosis: For those who can afford it, treatment gets more effective and an HIV diagnosis is no longer a death sentence.

+Dengue & chikungunya

These mosquito-borne diseases cause fever and severe bone and muscle pain. Dengue breaks out at unpredictable intervals in tropical Latin America and Asia,

while chikungunya has emerged out of East Africa and spread into the Indian Ocean region. There is no specific treatment for either disease and both can kill. Bite prevention is all-important.

Prognosis: Work continues on a dengue vaccine.


+Pneumonia

The biggest cause of premature death globally. The vaccine that protects against pneumococcal pneumonia is probably worth considering for backpackers (especially those who smoke).

Prognosis: A jab protects for life.

+Non-communicable disease

Some adventurous people set out poorly prepared in terms of physical fitness. People with significant arthritis, for example, might find that without pre-trip gym work the squat loo will be challenging. There is some evidence that if a heart attack is looming, the stress of flying can bring it on.

Prognosis: With the dramatic fall in smoking in the UK and better health promotion, incidence of early death from heart attack is less than ever, but it remains the responsibility of the traveller to do all they can to prepare for each trip. 

Since starting to write for Wanderlust in 1993, Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth has brought out multiple editions of her three travel health guides. Her newly revamped website is www.wilson-howarth.com.

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



Want to take
a pic like this?


Steve Davey

helps you capture the
magic of the travel
moment – this issue,
Lao New Year

Luang Prabang is a languid, relaxed city. You can't fail to be entranced by its quiet charm – unless you visit during Pi Mai Lao (Lao New Year), marked by a colossal water fight.

Of course, there's more to Pi Mai Lao than this: monks process Buddha statues; locals make offerings at temples and visit family to pay their respects. This was traditionally done with a gentle sprinkling of water, but has developed into a drunken drench-fest.

In the thick of it

Capturing the chaos means plunging into the action. The first thing to consider is protecting your camera. I used a pro Kata rain cover, but you can buy cheaper disposable DSLR rain covers that do a similar job. Screw a UV filter onto the lens to keep water out of the end element. When using a rain cover it's hard to access all of the camera controls, so set the camera to shoot as automatically as possible. The chaos of Pi Mai Lao is not the time to be fiddling with focus or exposure. 

See more of Steve Davey's pics – his book, **Around the World in 500 Festivals** (Kuperard, £20) is our Christmas gift offer! See p26.

1 Preserve the colours

If your camera is set to Auto White Balance, it will filter out some of the warm tones given by light at sunrise and sunset. Instead, set your camera to daylight; only use the auto setting if shooting in artificial light, to remove colour casts.

2 Shoot into the light

Don't always shoot with the sun behind you: shooting into the light can give atmospheric results, especially if there is mist or water in the air, or if it's around sunrise or sunset when the light has a pleasing warm tinge.

3 Compose

Don't place the subject in the centre of the frame. Be careful not to crop out significant objects; crop loose rather than tight as you can always increase the crop on a computer later.



4 Anticipate

Even if your camera has a motor-drive function that allows you to take a series of pictures in quick succession, try to anticipate the action and snap at the moment that encompasses the event. If your camera has a delay when you press the shutter release, half press and hold it to prefocus first.

TOP TIP

Join in the fun! Interact with people – your pictures will be more engaging if you're more engaged.

5 Freeze the action

When shooting action, you have two choices: use a fast shutter speed to freeze events, or a slower shutter speed to allow them to blur. If your camera has a 'Sport' or 'Action' mode it will set a fast speed for you.



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* Device will withstand incidental exposure to water of up to one meter of depth for 30 minutes. Optional dive case increases waterproof rating to 50 meters.

VIRB™ 1080p HD Action Camera

■ Traveller's Guide To...

DAYPACKS

From holding your important documents and can't-live-without items as hand luggage, to carrying your kit on a day walk or meander around town, the right daypack is an essential piece of travel gear

WAND POCKETS & COMPRESSION STRAPS

These pockets are really key features. They can be used to store your waterbottle, keeping it easy to reach, plus they're a good place to stash rubbish away from the rest of your items when you're out walking.

Compression straps are designed to pull a pack closer to your back, but they also enable you to securely stow walking poles or a tripod to the pack when placed in the pockets so that they don't wobble around, when you're walking.

BACK LENGTH & SYSTEM

Some bags are made to be one size fits all; others come in different sizes (ie XS, S, M, L). Finding the one that's right for you is what's important. Try a range of packs on – with some items inside them – before you buy one, to make sure you chose the one that fits you comfortably.

Most packs have a ventilated back system. This is usually sculpted foam and mesh panels or a curved shape that holds the pack away from your body allowing air to circulate so you don't get too sweaty when you're walking.

SHOULDER STRAPS & HIP BELTS

The straps balance the pack (you actually carry most of the weight on your legs and hips). Look for padding for maximum comfort and, when you try it on, make sure the shoulder straps don't contour into your armpits too sharply as they could be painful.

The hip belt helps support the load and stabilise the pack to your back so make sure it's comfortable and fits well without restricting your natural movement.

LID

Not all daypacks have lids – they may have a simple zip entry. However, having a lid can be handy: you can keep frequently needed items in the lid pocket or place wet garments under the lid so that the main contents stay dry.

SIZE

Look for something that's around 25 litres – this capacity size should be large enough for all your key items but also small enough to fit into the overhead lockers on planes or buses.

POCKETS

Daypacks can be simple, with minimal pockets, or boast many. Pockets are useful for organising your things, though too many can be confusing.

Inside, most daypacks have a pouch at the back that is compatible with hydration bladders (an alternative to using a water bottle); even if you don't use one it can be a great place for your important documents or an iPad/tablet.

FIT

Some packs are unisex, while others come in specific women's versions. These are cut with a female shape in mind – women carry weight differently to men due to their muscle structure. Bear in mind, though, that we're all different: some men may find a women's pack more suitable, while some ladies might prefer a male-cut model.



Featured Daypack

The rucksack pictured is the Lowe Alpine Airzone Quest 27 (£80), one of the most breathable packs on the market. For stockists and more products from Lowe Alpine visit www.lowealpine.com

Roadtest

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



VANGO
Elixir £30

THE TEST: Not only is this pack the cheapest on test, it's also the second lightest (unpacked weight 0.75kg). A lighter weight can mean fewer features – but not so with the Elixir.

This pack is certainly well designed. It boasts bungee straps on the front (perfect for stashing wet items away from the dry ones inside); a decent-sized front pocket complete with organiser pockets for your passport and tickets; and two separate compartments inside – including a cushioned pouch that easily takes a small laptop/tablet or, if walking, a hydration bladder. The mesh panels on the back help create ventilation and the shoulder straps are comfortable and mesh-padded too.

The only real downsides are the unpadded hip belt and the overall length of the pack, which means that tall items – walking poles, camera tripods – packed in the side pockets will stick out, which can be a nuisance.

THE VERDICT: A great feature-packed bag that, providing you don't require the extra length to carry a tripod or poles, is excellent value for money.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★



BERGHAUS
Remote £55

THE TEST: If you've got a bit more budget and want to shave off a few more grams (this one is the lightest on test – unpacked weight 0.70kg) then this is a great value pack.

There's a good range of features for your money: bungee cords on the front (ideal for stowing wet gear), a good size front pocket and a well-sized main compartment that includes organiser pockets and an extra zipped pocket for items you want to keep secure. It has a pouch inside that takes a hydration bladder or a tablet or laptop, while the generously padded back is vented.

The extra money buys you some padding on the hip belt, as well as a pocket on the shoulder strap (useful for an MP3 player). There's also an attachment point for cyclists to secure a light. The side pockets easily take a water bottle and there are Velcro attachments that help secure walking poles, though larger tripods may still be tricky because of the length.

THE VERDICT: A lightweight pack with lots of features including some added extras for those happy to pay a bit more.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★



LOWE ALPINE
AirZone Quest £80

THE TEST: You get what you pay for with the AirZone Quest. For a start it comes with a handy raincover. The front compartment is expandable, giving you options for fitting in quick-access items; better still, it also has its own pocket – ideal for tickets. There's also a side zip that gives you access to the bottom of the main compartment which can be handy.

The side pockets are deep, taking a water bottle easily. The compression straps are at a good height and secure tripods or poles well. The back system holds the pack away from your body so air can circulate well. It's also padded at the lower back with cushioning on the hip belt and shoulder straps which both have an extra pocket too. The rucksack lid has pockets on the outside and underneath (ideal for passport). Internally there's a pouch that takes a hydration bladder or a tablet.

The only downside is these extra features add grams: with an unpacked weight of 1.25kg, this is the second-heaviest pack here.

THE VERDICT: This feature-loaded pack is comfy, practical and transitions from plane to day-walk without compromising on function.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★



How we did the test...

We asked a range of gear manufacturers to send us the 25L-capacity daypacks that they felt were most suitable for travellers – that is, versatile enough to take on a plane as hand luggage, and then out on a walking trail. Sixteen arrived at *Wanderlust* HQ; editor Phoebe Smith then took them out on the road to see which performed best. The six here are all ‘*Wanderlust Approved!*’, with our Value Buy and Best Buy indicated.



ARC'TERYX Spear £80

THE TEST: This quirky Canadian brand has abandoned both the traditional lid top and zip entry and instead gone for a roll down closing that's secured by tightening two straps. Inside, the design twists continue with a pouch that's great for a small laptop, tablet or hydration bladder, plenty of space in the main compartment, smaller pouches for pens etc, and a discreet internal pocket perfect for a passport. Externally, there's an almost hidden pocket on the front that opens up to a large ticket-made space.

Both the comfortable back and the shoulder straps are cushioned and meshed for ventilation – though not as much as the other packs in this price bracket. The hip belt is not padded and there are no compression straps but the well-angled pockets take a large water bottle easily and even a small tripod. Poles fitted OK due to the pocket angle, though compression straps would have helped.

THE VERDICT: A unique design that still boasts most of the key features needed in a daypack – perfect for those who don't need the compression straps or a padded hip belt.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★



FJÄLLRÄVEN Funäs £80

THE TEST: This is another pack that proves paying a little more gets you a lot of great features. The Funäs has bungee cords on the front for stashing a jacket or wet kit. The side pockets are deep and the compression straps well angled to help secure a tripod or poles. The back is well vented via a ridged foam and mesh system, as are the shoulder straps and the hip belt, making the pack sit comfortably. There is no front pocket but it does come with a raincover. The lid offers both external and internal zipped pockets.

Inside, the main compartment easily takes all walking gear. The pouch is fairly narrow – designed to take a hydration bladder – which means fitting in anything bigger than a small tablet could be tricky. There is a zip pocket inside near the top – great for a passport. Unpacked this is the heaviest daypack on test (1.35kg) but then it does have some great features.

THE VERDICT: A streamlined pack with many key features, though its narrower internal pouch and lack of a front pocket means it just misses out on the top spot.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★



KELTY Shrike £90

THE TEST: The outstanding feature of this pack is its opening. Thanks to the zip design, it has the widest entrance of all the items on test, making packing a doddle. It's also the third lightest here (unpacked weight 0.90kg).

Designed to flip between commuting and trekking, it has a number of other excellent features, such as the sturdy handle on the front for an alternate way of carrying it. There's a front-zipped pocket, which can take a tablet, as well as a smaller top pocket for essentials. Inside there's a cushioned pouch – perfect for a larger laptop – with an organiser on the front for pens etc; it doesn't take a hydration bladder.

Outside, the side pockets hold a bottle and the compression straps are good, doubling over to really secure walking poles or a tripod. The back system is a series of vented mesh panels and the shoulder straps the same. The hip belt is partially vented and padded, but not as much as some on test.

THE VERDICT: Well-designed, with a wide opening that makes it a breeze to pack, but the higher price may be a turn-off for some.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★



19

HAVE YOUR SPACE INVADED BY THE

BIGGEST MAMMAL ON EARTH

Québec's St Lawrence River is bursting with whales, and is a prime place to meet the mighty blue. Get ready to weep...

WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**



“No! I will not stop for something small!” Our captain, Francis, yelled over the engine’s roar as our Zodiac bounced over the waves. Just behind him a pod of dolphins was swimming away, leaping and diving

in a frenzy of fins and tails. Seconds before, the whole boat had been alive with excitement as someone had spotted these playful mammals swarming round us. But when we’d gestured for Francis to stop for photos he was less than willing to oblige. I suppose he thought us fools to want to waste our efforts and memory cards on

something that here, in Québec’s St Lawrence River, was about as common as a field of sheep in Wales.

“I’ve heard reports of a blue whale 5km away,” he explained, exasperated. “It is the biggest creature in the world – it can grow to 30m long – and some people go their whole lives without seeing one. We should get there now!” We all nodded in agreement and watched as the dolphins grew ever distant in our wake, their fins eventually swallowed by the waves.

Wave watching

Here in Baie-Sainte-Catherine, in the Charlevoix Valley, three-hour drive from Québec City, the massive St Lawrence River – which runs from Ontario to the Atlantic – turns tidal, and is renowned for the number of marine mammals that swim in it. At the right times of ►



‘Here in Baie-Sainte-Catherine, the massive St Lawrence River turns tidal and is renowned for the number of marine mammals that swim in it’

Valley spectacular
Aside from the whales (a humpback is shown on the previous page), Québec's Charlevoix Valley is worth a visit for the secluded forests and lakes that abound in the area near Baie-Sainte-Catherine



A whale of a time

(Clockwise from this) A minke whale grabs the crowd's attention; Captain Francis; the whale makes a beeline for the Zodiac; Captain Francis explains the reason he doesn't stop for dolphins!



◀ year (between May and October) the chance that you'll see whales here is very high. But despite this, I'd not allowed myself to build up any hope – there are, after all, no guarantees. The first time I'd tried a trip like this was in New Zealand; I'd sat on a boat for nearly eight hours without seeing so much as a dolphin – hence my heavy heart at leaving them behind now.

But Francis had good reason to move quickly. Though blue whales famously swim in these waters, once they've come up to take a breath they dive and may not surface again for up to 20 minutes, perhaps many kilometres away. I focused on the water, willing a whale to appear.

Some curious seals popped up to the right and a woman leapt from her seat to point them out. Beside her, a man fumbled to get out his camera, but it was

too late; they were long gone, and so were we. I glanced to the cockpit and saw Francis, gaze fixed ahead, a determined look in his eyes. I returned to scrutinising the waves. And then I spotted a boat.

It didn't appear to be moving, just bobbing about. At its stern an excited crowd of people gathered. They seemed to be staring straight at us. Then it happened. A humpback whale burst up from the blue, water gushing down its body, fins splayed. With an almighty crash, it slammed back onto the surface and was gone.

I've never thought of myself as the type to cry at seeing an animal. Sure, I shed a tear when I achieved my lifelong ambition of reaching Everest Base Camp. I got a little emotional skydiving, plummeting at 190km/h and gazing at the curve of the earth. And I wept unashamedly the first time I saw the aurora borealis come out to play. But to well up over an animal? I just didn't see it happening. But, before I knew it, I felt my nose start to fizz as my eyes fought back the tears. ►



'Then it happened. A humpback whale burst up from the blue, water gushing down its body, fins splayed. With an almighty crash, it slammed back onto the surface and was gone'



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◀ As I struggled to compose myself the humpback leapt again. Not quite as dramatically this time but still shooting up so high for something so large, seemingly defying gravity. There was an audible gasp. Watching such a huge creature breach like this – barely 60m away – was more powerful than I ever thought possible. It felt almost unreal, like I might be watching it on TV. We were so awestruck that we didn't even think to take photographs. It was only when it breached for the last time, before it flashed its tail and disappeared, that we began to remember our cameras.

None of us had even realised that Francis had stopped the boat until he appeared over our shoulders and showed us a photo of the whale we'd just seen. Her name, he said, was Blanche-Neige – Blizzard – identifiable by her almost entirely white tail. She was first spotted in the estuary back in 2008.

The atmosphere on the boat had now switched from tense anticipation to post-sighting elation. Everyone felt the pressure had been released. We had been blessed with an amazing sighting;

even if we didn't see anything else, it had been a good trip. Little did we know the best was yet to come.

Blue view

With the blue whale sighting still on his mind, Francis turned the boat and headed north, following the directions that had come over the radio. There were a few other boats out but not too many. Operators need permits to run whalewatching trips here, and must follow strict regulations that dictate how close they can get to a whale, how fast they can move and how long they can stay around. The enforcement of these rules has meant that this part of the river has become something of a sanctuary for the whales – there's lots of food for them and they are not disturbed. In turn, this means whale numbers, and sightings, are good.

We saw evidence of this happy relationship when we stumbled on our next sighting, this time a fin whale – the world's second-largest mammal, after the blue. The fin wasn't as ostentatious as the humpback; we saw its large back poking above the water and ►

'As I struggled to compose myself the humpback leapt again. Not quite as dramatically but still shooting up so high for something so large, seemingly defying gravity'

Making a splash

The humpback whale known as Blizzard, or Blanche-Neige, breaches from the water and disappears with the flip of her tail



◀ a plume chuting out of its blowhole but there were no acrobatics. As we stopped to watch, it became apparent that the fin was actually sleeping. Our presence didn't seem to bother it though; every so often it would spurt some more water but otherwise it didn't move. A couple more boats began approaching so, in order not to crowd it, Francis slowly moved away.

We shot off over the water, back on the lookout for the blue. More dolphins appeared and disappeared, then Francis stopped the boat once more: "It's here!"

On cue, a fountain of water shot up into the air over to the left side of the boat. Minutes later a blue whale swam by so close I felt I could reach out and touch it – the distance we were supposed to keep from each other had apparently not been explained to this cetacean.

I'd seen pictures – I knew in theory how big blue whales were supposed to be. Seeing one in real life, it truly was gargantuan. Its fin sliced through the waves effortlessly, not giving away for a second just how much mass was floating underneath. It was only its paler colour that gave it away as it moved like a white shadow through the water. Nature certainly has a sense of humour, creating something this big that lives on tiny krill.

As we watched it recede, a second blue whale appeared on the other side of the Zodiac, announcing itself in a spray of water. This one didn't show itself as dramatically as the humpback either, and any photos show nothing more than a flash of a back and fin. But photos didn't matter. The sight of this immense mammal floating right past would be etched in my mind forever.

All the small things

As we began heading back to shore we were treated to a tail-flap by not one but three minke whales as they dived out of our way. Then another humpback almost breached but changed its mind at the last minute, instead only revealing its scratched and white-dotted tail – this was Tic Tac Toe, a female first seen here in the winter of 1998.

Before we reached land there was one final surprise. Slowing the boat down, Francis took us into the mouth of the Saguenay Fjord, which joins the St Lawrence River. He gestured for us to look. All around was just choppy water, foaming white where the salty estuary met the outflow of the fjord.

"Can you see them?" he asked. We looked again – nothing.

Then, as though someone had given me a pair of 3D glasses, the scene suddenly started to make sense. I realised that the 'surf' wasn't foaming breakers at all, but hundreds of beluga whales jumping in and out of the waves. These small, white Arctic whales are endangered but there's currently around 1,000 in the safe waters here.

As we turned away from these camouflaged creatures and veered back towards the harbour, two seals peered out from the water and, to our surprise, Francis stopped the engine. I looked round at him in astonishment.

"Now we can stop for something small," he smiled. 📷

Phoebe Smith is the editor of *Wanderlust* and author of *Extreme Sleeps* (Summersdale, 2013). Follow her adventures on Twitter @PhoebeRSmith

Québec Essentials

✈️ Getting there & around

Air Canada (0871 220 1111, www.aircanada.com) flies from London Heathrow to Québec City via Montréal. Flight time is from 11 hours; returns cost from around £540.

From Québec City, hire a car to reach Baie-Sainte-Catherine (220km/3hrs). Alternatively, **Intercar buses** (www.intercar.qc.ca) run between Montréal, Québec City and Charlevoix, stopping at Baie-Sainte-Catherine.

The scenic **Le Massif de Charlevoix 'rail-cruise' train** (C\$275pp [£167] rtn; www.lemassif.com) links Québec City to La Malbaie, which is 80km from Baie-Sainte-Catherine.

🛏️ Accommodation

There are lots of choices in the Charlevoix Valley. Recommended is **L'Auberge des**

Falaises (La Malbaie; www.aubergedesfalaises.com), a family-run B&B with fireplaces in the rooms and balconies offering glorious views over the forest and to the St Lawrence River.

🔭 Whalewatching

The author travelled with **Croisières AML** (www.croisieresaml.com), a family-owned company that offers a number of whalewatching trips aboard both Zodiacs and larger boats with on-board facilities. All are accompanied by an English-speaking naturalist/captain. Trips run May-October; the best time to see whales is late summer (July-August).

📍 More information

www.tourisme-charlevoix.com – Regional tourist board
www.bonjourquebec.com – Québec tourist board.



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What's more, this year they launched a new online store from which they sell some of the world's greatest adventure travel brands and equipment.

The best brands

Take *Houdini*. New to the UK, this Swedish brand offers base layers, underwear, warm and waterproof jackets, perfect from walking trails to sharing tales in the pub.

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Last but by no means least there's Austrian brand *Design Salt*, who make a range of lightweight sleeping bags that pack-down small to fit in your luggage as well as a range of travel sheets and accessories – perfect for warmer climates.

All First Ascent's employees have racked up a number of global adventures. As such they understand how critical it is to have the right gear so that you can forget about your kit and concentrate on creating memories.

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FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

As a boy, I used to feed my imagination with books. Poring over the pages, I'd discover the depths with deep-sea divers, soar with winged dinosaurs and clamber through ruined jungle temples and lost kingdoms. I could travel into space, march with Roman empires and battle medieval knights, all from the comfort of my bedroom. I also distinctly remember reading of real life dragons from a far off land; legendary beasts with forked tongues and ferocious fangs, something that back then was as fantastical as the rest. Fast-forward 20 years, and I found myself crouched on a grassy tussock on a remote island in the tropics looking at one of those exact same dragons. It seemed an awfully long way from the wide-eyed childhood stories to being here, close enough to see the veins in its eyes, but I'd finally arrived at Komodo Island.

The dragons, or ora as locals know them, are unique to this part of the world. Aside from Komodo Island, neighbouring Rinca and a smattering on nearby Flores, they're found nowhere else in the wild.

Komodo dragons will quite happily eat you – this is something that's generally worth remembering. Local villagers have fallen victim in the past and there have been reports of other non-fatal attacks too. A warden here was attacked at his office desk a few years back, which makes your standard repetitive strain injury complaints at home seem quite futile. The warden survived, but was then attacked again in the same manner. If ever a career change was needed I think this was it.

With this in mind we kept in close proximity to our guides, each armed with a not so reassuring stick, and set about finding

■ Your Story

Beauty and the beasts

Reader **Ally Gale**
realises a life-long
ambition on a trip to the
islands of Komodo



some dragons. The first one we saw was on Rinca. Hanging around the camp of wardens' huts was a two-metre lizard, eyeing us warily from the grass. In years gone by the ora were tempted in front of tourist cameras by being fed goats, but it's not a practice that goes on now. Still, this one was pretty comfortable in his surroundings and there was a definite sense that he was more than an occasional visitor – it wasn't quite the wild encounter I'd imagined. We trekked further inland in search of more, but having arrived at midday with the sun at its hottest we saw nothing further except for some fetching views.

After spending the afternoon snorkelling with large turtles, clownfish and stingrays at nearby Pink Beach, we moored up overnight close to Komodo Island. As masses of flying foxes returned to roost overhead, we watched an almost full moon rise over the Flores Sea and settled in for a night on the deck under the stars. Rising with the light, we arrived for some trekking shortly after dawn and as a result fared much better. Within minutes we'd seen an infant dragon head poking from the safety of his tree top hole – they're a cannibalistic species, with youngsters prime target – and another larger lizard soon after. It was further inland that a real sense of wilderness took hold however. Arriving on a hilltop with unbroken views over the island and surrounding seas, there was a large dragon warming himself in the early morning sun. It looked immense.

He awoke and yawned, and while the teeth remained hidden from view, there flicked a forked tongue coated in the bacteria ridden saliva, which forms part of its arsenal. When unable to fell bigger prey alone, such as a water buffalo, a Komodo dragon will simply bite its victim, pull out a chair and crossword,



On the prowl
A Komodo dragon on
Komodo island; (below)
flying foxes at dusk

and wait. Progressing from open wound to infection, the buffalo will eventually weaken, essentially serving itself up on a plate. This can take weeks. It's a feeding process of great patience, desperation and awful misery – much like a visit to McDonald's for you or I.

We descended to the beach-side warden's camp where we counted eight, maybe nine, more dragons. Despite the insistence from our guide that "they just like it here" there was still the sense of something not quite so wild and natural, just as on Rinca. Still, being surrounded by so many Komodo dragons is not to be forgotten – an ambition had been

achieved, a childhood fantasy realised.

The adventure hadn't ended yet however, as we moved from beasts of the land to beasts of the sea. The waters around this idyllic archipelago off the coast of Flores teemed with life. We made for Manta Point next, where we found an uncountable amount of giant manta rays. Measuring metres across, the huge rays glided over the seabed before swooping effortlessly upwards with the currents. From there we made tracks to Labuan Bajo, passing more mantas and turtles along the way. Flying fish and sprats exploded through the surface regularly, while a small pod of dolphins came and went.

It had been a humbling couple of days – as wildlife expeditions go, surely this couldn't be bettered? Or could it? We were next bound for Borneo and a visit to perhaps the greatest childhood story of all – we were off to discover a real-life version of *The Jungle Book*.

Amazing travel experience? Post it for a chance to win: wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust



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LETTERS

Your mail, missives and messages – from 20-year readers to credit card hassles in Puerto Rico and the best way to snap Mt Cook...

Puerto Rico info

We just got back from a wonderful holiday in Puerto Rico [featured in March 2013 issue] and there's an important bit of intel to pass on about credit cards. We had our PINs blocked. It's only by chance we found out what was happening.

Chip and PIN is in its infancy in Puerto Rico. When the seller was asked for a PIN number, they didn't know any better and they were putting in their merchant number. Of course three times doing that and – BAM – credit card gone.

After ringing back home it was established we couldn't unblock the cards until our return to England. It was also accompanied by several expensive phone calls from the bank thinking that we'd had our cards stolen. I wanted to pass our experience on to warn others.

Poe Hills, by email

Cuiabá River row

If you are planning to visit the Cuiabá River in Brazil's Northern Pantanal to see jaguars please take the time to check what type of river trip your lodge runs. Many seem to rate a formal lunch as important as seeing the cats and take you back for lunch, allowing only three-hour am and pm trips.

In order to compensate for the time wasted getting to and from the best parts of the river for spotting jaguars they use very fast speedboats. These cause significant noise pollution and a bow wave that puts other river users at risk of capsizing.

★ STAR LETTER ★ 20 years of travel

I've just been looking through the photos of your front covers from the past 20 years. I'm happy to say that I have read every single edition!

It was your first issue that made me want to go to Ecuador and the Galápagos, which I finally did in 1999. Diego Torres, having just started as a tour guide [in 2009 he won the Wanderlust World Guide Awards], led us in Ecuador.

We have planned many more journeys, inspired by you, and are still hoping to be able to plan a few more! Congratulations on your magazine's success!

Pauline Lewis, by email

However, the greatest impact is the erosion of the river banks. The river levels are reducing significantly and families of giant otters have already been spotted in trouble trying to move their group and fish on parts of the river.

Take a trip with your lunch and coolbox for eight hours. You will see much more general wildlife and with a bit of luck enjoy a peaceful lunch while watching a jaguar reclining watching you.

Chris Bell, by email

Aurora hunting

I've just read the northern lights article [Issue 142, Nov 2013] – remarkable that you saw in them for three nights running.

I visited Iceland last January with the hope of seeing them,

and managed to do so on a clear night (our only one of the week!) off the north of the Snaefellsnes peninsula. We drove out into the middle of nowhere, parking up on a cliff top looking out over the ocean, and the aurora was visible as a pale green rainbow.

A while later it began to grow and sprout flares, morphing into huge towers of neon green, before settling into a rainbow. Half an hour later, it went off again.

It was amazing, but I can also remember how bitterly cold it was – even wrapped up, we couldn't last more than 20 minutes outside the car! I was unable to get a decent photo, as my camera's too basic – but to be honest, it could never have captured the experience.

markymark983, on the forum



WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue our winning contribution wins a haul of Wanderlust gear. Congratulations to Pauline and thanks for all your support though the years!



Experiences

JUST BACK FROM



suzycatpope has returned from a three-day trip to Akureyri, Iceland

The highlight: A fish restaurant called Noa, which was on the shore but a five-minute walk from the main street, so it was really quiet. It was the best fish of my life though – I'm serious. The chef even opened especially for us on Sunday because we were desperate for another taste!

Must see: A little wander through the residential streets is a must because the town itself is home to many artists and it shows in the little gardens. Sculptures, rusting candelabras, twangy wind-chimes and

inventive barbecues are just a few of the highlights.

Top tip: Akureyri is the capital of the north and an excellent place to base yourself for the Northern Golden Circle (Lake Myvatn etc). If you're doing the ring road, don't just stop overnight, spend a few days there. There is plenty to see and it's a lovely town to explore.

Cautionary tale: Nothing major, I was going to attempt a stay without renting a car, and that would have been a mistake. Tours are expensive and the town itself is surprisingly spread out.

I wish I'd known... That the northern lights were going to make a spectacular appearance. I wouldn't have had those three pints after dinner. I wish that I could have driven into the middle of nowhere to see them properly.

This month you have mostly been...

f Trekking section one of **The Great Himalaya Trail** in **Nepal**, from Mount Kanchenjunga to Mount Makalu with 36 days on trail. [Rolan Hunter, Facebook](#)

t Planning an adventure: [@wanderlustmag](#) landed on my doorstep and there's a feature on **Sri Lanka**. I fly to Colombo next week! [#perfecttiming @farfromalba](#)

w Exploring **Western Oz**. The highlight was the Pinnacles Desert, near Cervantes. Sand dunes at Lancelin for sandboarding or two or four wheeled off-roading were also must-do activities. [Chris Prior, myWanderlust](#)

t Iceland plotting: A week before I fly and my copy of [@wanderlustmag](#) drops on the

mat with a **#NorthernLights** feature, perfect! [@journeynator](#)

w Taking in **Petra, Jordan**. It wasn't quite like I'd imagined but it certainly exceeded expectations. The 'Petra by Night' event is so atmospheric and is a nice way to spend an evening. [rachiejm, myWanderlust](#)

t Being inspired: Home to the new [@wanderlustmag](#), perfect reading for tomorrow's flight before exploring **Andalucia** for a week [#travel #adventure @Robwatson85](#)

w Immersing ourselves into the culture of the **Bahamas**. My advice? Skip Paradise Island and make it to **The Out Islands**. [smplythreecents, myWanderlust](#)

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

On the approach to Mount Cook

By Howard Perry

"Visitors to New Zealand's Mt Cook National Park can easily see close-up views of the peak as it dominates the skyline. Patience is rewarded as the weather swiftly changes the mood of the mountain."

"This was taken from my hotel car park using a tripod, to get the sharpest picture possible. Over an hour I watched the changes in light while a telephoto lens brought the ridge fully into the picture."

"I chose exactly the moment when the sun lit the swirling wisps above the raw-edged, tooth-like peaks of the mountain range."



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Now & then

The *Tren Crucero* among the lush forest of the Chanchán River valley between Bucay and Huígra; in spite, this river has caused the railway's engineers constant difficulties for over a century; (*inset*) spot the Editor-in-Chief! A photo from Lyn Hughes' first Ecuadorian train ride 20-year-ago – when you were 'allowed' to ride the roof



20 TRAVEL IN TRADITIONAL STYLE

The long-derelict railway linking Ecuador's coast and capital – via the looming Andes – has reopened. Is it the world's wildest ride?

WORDS **ANTHONY LAMBERT**





Pulling out the stops
(clockwise from here) locals salute the train; the stretching fields in the Chimborazo region; The *Tren Crucero* at Guamote Station

‘Ecuadoreans were delighted to see the railway back in operation. Doorways were filled with waving, smiling people, many holding up mobile phones to record the moment’

As our train climbed beside the Chanchán River, we watched the bizarrely shaped mountain grow steadily larger. Known to local Indians as the Condor’s Nest, after the vast black birds that circle its summit, it’s now more commonly called the Devil’s Nose. At its foot we stopped to admire the vertiginous slopes – and the audacity of the Virginian-born engineer who forced a railway up them over a century ago.

Minutes later, clustered on the open balcony at the end of the train, we marvelled at the narrow ledge that had been chiselled into the hillside to accommodate the zigzagging rails. They wound round the peak, coming to dead-ends where the train reversed and growled up the next arm of the switchback. This engineering wonder feels hemmed in by equally monumental mountains, so narrow are the valleys that separate them.

We were lucky to be there at all. Five years ago the railway between Ecuador’s two main cities, coastal Guayaquil and capital Quito, was derelict, tracks reverting to nature, trains rusting away, station offices abandoned. So much of the line had been destroyed by landslides and the Chanchán’s raging waters that few thought it would ever work again. But in 2008 President Rafael Correa announced that it would be rebuilt for tourists.

I was aboard the first eastbound departure of the *Tren Crucero* (Cruise Train), a four-day journey, including overnights in hotels and off-train excursions, that promised to be the ultimate slow way to experience seven of Ecuador’s nine climatic zones. I’d chosen to ride from the coast into the Andes because the gradual ascent from sea level gives the body more time to adjust to the country’s dizzying altitudes than flying into the 2,800m-high capital. Also, UNESCO-listed Quito provides more of a climax than the uninspiring commercial city of Guayaquil.

And we’re off...

The day before, the station in Guayaquil had come as quite a shock. In the 1980s, when I’d ridden from here on the tender of a steam locomotive, the ramshackle station had been in such a dangerous condition that it was cordoned off. Now a new terminus contains a two-storey waiting hall in which a film plays, showing the colossal scale of the reconstruction works undertaken.

From the moment a newly overhauled steam locomotive eased us out of Guayaquil station, it was obvious that Ecuadoreans along the 440km railway were delighted to see it back in operation. Doorways were filled with waving, smiling people, many holding up mobile phones to record the moment. While the railway is no longer the unifying thread it was on opening in 1908, the towns along the line – which suffered when the railway closed – have had their stations rebuilt as community focal points, with cafés, craft shops and small museums.

It was almost half an hour before Guayaquil’s chaotic suburban jumble ►





‘Tethered goats yanked on their ropes as the unfamiliar train snorted past, and dogs revealed their characters by displaying either nonchalance or a vocal determination to chase the black beast off their patch’

◀ gave way to paddy fields watched over by egrets and then to fields of sugar cane. Houses of split-cane and corrugated iron perched on flimsy stilts to keep them out of floodwaters and free from vermin and snakes. Tethered goats yanked on their ropes as the unfamiliar train snorted past, and dogs revealed their characters by displaying either nonchalance or a vocal determination to chase the black beast off their patch.

At Yaguachi the steam locomotive was exchanged for a soulless diesel – the four coaches and generator van of *Tren Crucero* are considered too heavy for such venerable engines on the fierce gradients of the Andes. Two of those coaches were fitted with sofas and banquettes angled to gaze out of big picture windows; as I sat here, a snack of battered cassava, drizzled with honey, arrived from the small kitchen.

Most passengers congregated on the open rear balcony to enjoy the landscape and catch passing scents, such as the earthy smell of the cacao plantation. We paid a visit on one of our excursions, sampling the sweet white flesh – untemptingly known as *mucilage* – that surrounds the purple ‘chocolate’ bean.

Another off-train expedition took us on a narrow winding path into humid cloudforest to appreciate the innumerable uses of its luxuriant plant life. We found the toquilla, used to make the erroneously attributed Panama hat (they actually originate from Ecuador); we also discovered chonta palm, which can be fashioned into arrows and knives, or woven to make roofs that last up to 60 years. In Guamote we admired the work of Inti Sisa, a Belgian-funded charity providing locals with

education and training; at Balbanera we visited the oldest church in Ecuador, founded in 1534.

The howling wilderness

But it was the Guayaquil & Quito Railway itself that enthralled us, penetrating mountains that seemed incapable of receiving a railway. For over 20 years, no engineer could find a practical route beyond ‘the Bridge of Chimbo’ near Bucay. It was here that Edward Whymper, conqueror of the Matterhorn, travelled in 1880 during his mountaineering expedition in the Andes; he noted that he passed through country ‘which it would be too complimentary to call a howling wilderness’.

However, it was into this terrain that a West Point Military Academy graduate, Major John A Harman, finally devised



a route. In just 79km between Bucay and the first of several summits, at Palmira, the railway climbs an astonishing 2,945m.

For much of the climb the railway has a river for company as it twists and turns and describes great horseshoe curves in the struggle to surmount the contours. In sunshine it's hard to imagine Whympers 'howling wilderness', but for many miles we saw not a soul, nor any sign of habitation. Occasionally we passed a lonely cow or a knot of llamas. The mountain slopes were so high that the summits could rarely be seen and the vegetation changed dramatically as the luxuriant cloudforest was replaced by stands of tall eucalyptus, then pine.

Our arrival in the large town of Riobamba coincided with the sun setting over Chimborazo, Ecuador's highest peak at 6,268m. Resembling a fat Mt Fuji, the mountain was first climbed by Whympers, making him the first man to be as close as possible to the sun since the beginning of time: due to the elliptical shape of the planet, Chimborazo is about 2,000m higher than Everest when measured from the centre of the earth.

Proof of Newton's ellipse theory was concluded in Ecuador in the 1730s by a French scientific team under Charles Marie de La Condamine. He stayed at Hacienda La Cienega, where we spent our last night. ►

Wild country
Horses roam in Cotopaxi National Park; (left) inside the *Tren Crucero*

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The heart of the city
The Plaza Grande – or Plaza de la Independencia – has been one of Quito's focal point for centuries

Cloud obliterated the snow-capped peak, but briefly parted to reveal its wonderfully symmetrical cone. We watched as mountain-bikers began a thrilling descent on gravel roads through the treeless flower-speckled páramo and into the pine forests below.

Restoration nation

The railway provides grandstand views along the Avenue of Volcanoes on the approach to Quito, the line hugging the upper slopes before a final descent to the city's station. The oldest capital of the Americas, Quito was the first city to be declared a World Heritage site, in 1978; during the last decade or so it has received the same kind of transformation as the railway.

From the superbly restored Casa Gangotena, overlooking the former Inca market place of Plaza San Francisco, I wandered streets of freshly white- and cream-washed buildings that would have been off-limits ten years ago. Also, community organisations are helping to preserve the neighbourhoods' characters and traditional crafts, such as hat-making and statuary carving. Yet among all the city's fabulous churches and monasteries, it was the railway station that Quiteños recently voted as their favourite building. Now, thanks to President Correa's bold vision, they – and numerous visitors – will have the chance to use it again. **✎**

◀ Thick-walled and built around a courtyard water garden, the hacienda is full of crudely painted faces from past centuries looking down over heavy dark furniture. I slept in the generous suite occupied by Condamine and, later, Alexander von Humboldt, who was a guest while studying Cotopaxi's volcanic activity in 1802.

Simply breathtaking

Long before refrigeration, the mountains were a source of ice. At the railway's highest station of Urbina, at 3,609m, we met

Baltazar Uscha, a 69-year-old Quechua Indian who is the last iceman of Chimborazo. Barely five feet tall, with a face the texture of elephant hide, he still supplies a few villages (as his father and grandfather did before him). He walks for four hours to the icefield, cuts the blocks and then loads them into donkey panniers for the journey back down.

No such arduousness for us. On our final excursion, we were driven to the 4,800m refuge on Cotopaxi, which, at 5,897m, is Ecuador's second-highest mountain.

Ecuador Essentials

? Need to know

The author travelled with **Rainbow Tours** (020 7666 1260, www.rainbowtours.co.uk), which offers the *Tren Crucero* as part of an 11-day **Scenic Ecuador by Train** itinerary. The trip costs from £2,985pp, including return flights from London, four nights at Casa Gangotena in Quito, two nights at Hacienda Pinsaqui near Otavalo, one night at Oro Verde in Guayaquil, daily breakfast, full board in hotels and haciendas during the *Tren Crucero* journey, and transfers.

There are no direct UK-Quito flights. **KLM** (0871 231 0000, klm.com) flies via Amsterdam; Iberia flies via **Madrid** (0870 609 0500, iberia.com). **LAN** (0845 098 0140, lan.com) flies to Guayaquil via Madrid. Journey time, including stops, is from around 15 hours.

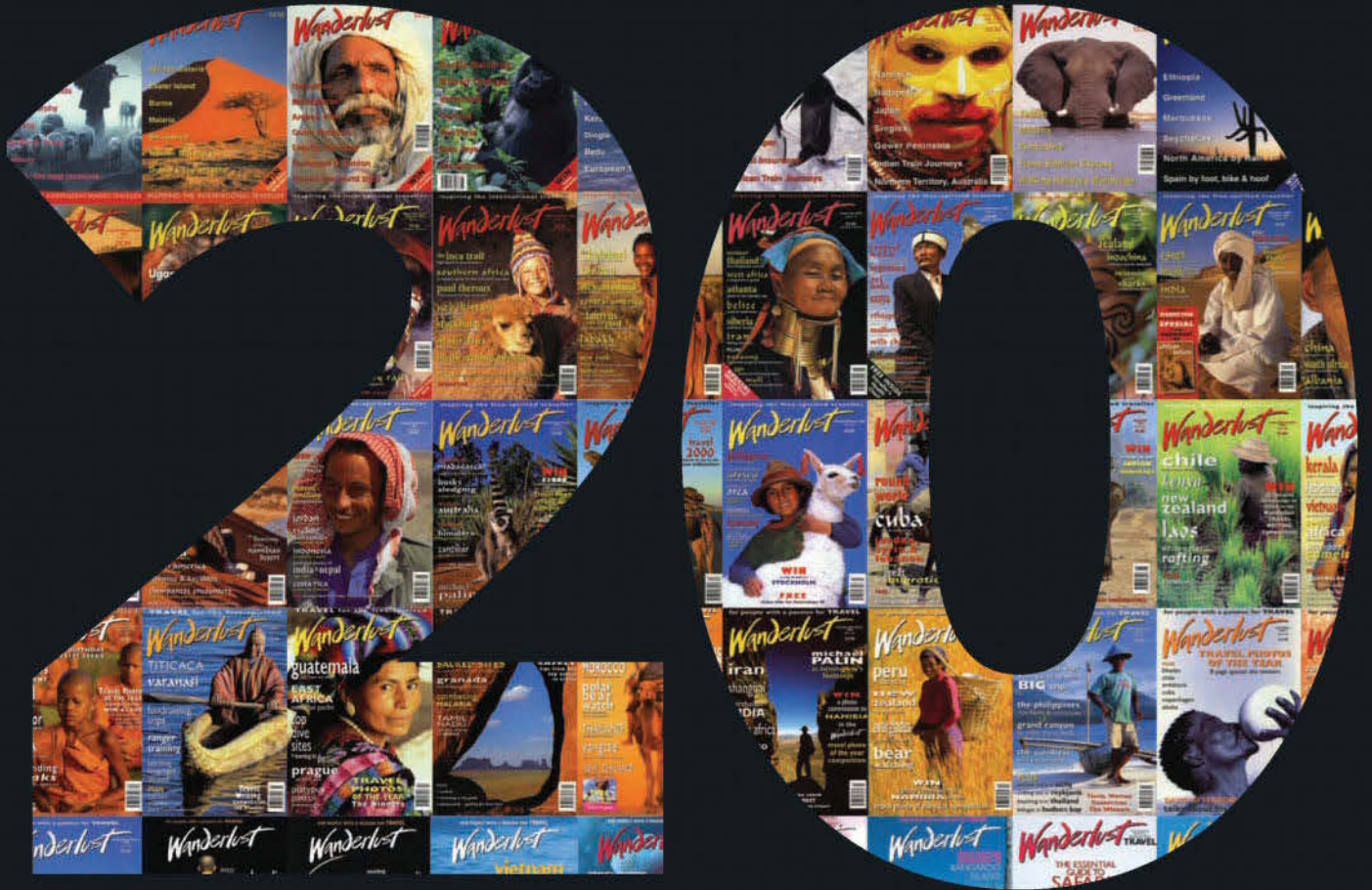
For more info on *Tren Crucero*, including 2014 departure times, see www.trenecuador.com/crucero.

TOP TIP

For unrivalled views of Quito and its 14 surrounding peaks, as well as walks in the hills above the city, take the cablecar to the 4,050m summit of Cruz Loma. Dress warmly.



CELEBRATING



IN TRAVEL



A sickbag, a back bedroom and a wonderfully naive business plan – that’s how *Wanderlust* was born. Co-founders Lyn Hughes and Paul Morrison, travelling so light they had no notebook or pen, borrowed a biro and schemed their idea on the only paper to hand while flying to Ecuador in the early 1990s. Their mission statement: produce a magazine filled with stuff we like. Simple. And, as it’s turned out 20 years on, very effective.

Produced in the couple’s spare room and launched in November 1993, the first issue of *Wanderlust* had just 64 pages. *BBC Holiday* featured amid the TV listings; the prize for the photo competition was 20 rolls of Kodacolor film! But, funnily enough, the rest is surprisingly similar. Not as slick, perhaps, but the informative, inspirational features are still there: an overview of Ecuador (the footnotes reveal that the population has since grown by 50%); a cycle trip from Jersey to China; the expert’s guide to dive locations; an interview with the ever indefatigable Dervla Murphy (“I would have done just as well killing them with a knife – though it would have been messier...”).

So how are we celebrating our 20th birthday? More of the same, just better. We’ve increased our frequency from six to ten magazines a year. And, as we devote this issue to the way travel can change us, we’ve brought in a few changes ourselves, freshening up our look and ensuring our content is as relevant and interesting as ever. ►



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Hang on to your hats
Paul and Lyn in the
Galápagos in 1992.
The idea that will become
Wanderlust is in Paul's
satchel, scrawled on
the back of a sickbag

Travel has certainly changed a fair bit since 1993, the year the EU was formed (originally of 12 member states; there are now 28), William Dalrymple published *City of Djinns* and Mr Blobby was Christmas number one. "Technology is the most obvious difference," reckons Jennifer Cox, travel writer and Press & Publicity Manager of Lonely Planet in 1993, when Lyn and Paul walked into her office and announced their plans. "Back in the 1990s, I was travelling with my Walkman, an unwieldy bag of cassettes and my 'high-tech' PalmPilot. Today it's an iPad." Technology has lightened our bags, brightened our bus journeys and brought

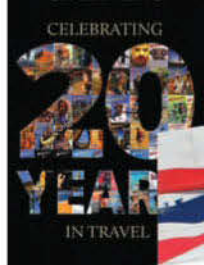
more of the world to our fingertips. But has it also diminished the travel experience? "I could rue the fact that, whether in India or Iceland, we're bumping into locals on their cell phones as we're busy checking our emails," adds Jennifer. "But we all have the choice to switch off, and if locals' lives seem less 'exotic' for being more like our own, does that make travel any less authentic?" Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, *Wanderlust's* health guru since issue 1, is rather less glowing about some aspects of technology. "Being in touch with back home has more disadvantages than advantages, in my opinion," she states. "I love being out of touch – yet it's more and more difficult to pretend I am." That said, Dr Jane concedes there are advantages: "There's been a huge expansion in information-sharing, so it's easier to know about outbreaks, antibiotic resistance and security. I really value my colleagues in travel health and relish the opportunities to network." Our modes of travel have changed significantly too. "In 1993, easyJet didn't exist, Ryanair was tiny and Alitalia pretended the cheapest it could possibly go between London and Rome was £250," recalls Simon Calder, Senior Travel Editor of *The Independent*. "Today, the passenger has (most of) the market power." ►

THEN VS NOW

Was travel better in '93? The past squares up to its present day rival

1. Poste Restante vs email and Facebook
2. Paper airplane tickets vs e-tickets
3. One-hour check-in vs 3-hour check-in
4. Booking a phone call vs using your mobile
5. Travellers cheques vs ATMs
6. Postcards vs Tweeting
7. Camera film vs digital photos
8. Hotel keys vs key cards
9. Paperbacks vs Kindles
10. Local tea vs cappuccinos
11. Photo albums vs memory sticks
12. Queuing at embassies vs online e-visas
13. Getting lost vs Google maps
14. Confirming flights vs online check-in
15. Full-service airlines vs low-cost carriers
16. Dollars vs euros
17. Suitcases vs wheelee bags
18. Walkman & cassette tapes vs iPod
19. Travel alarm clock vs mobile phone
20. Waiting for films to be processed vs instant gratification





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Concorde was
retired in 2003

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◀ Indeed, flying has never been cheaper – although this has somewhat cheapened the experience. Long gone is any Pan Am glamour, unless you can afford Business (don't expect an upgrade for looking smart and smiley these days). Instead, you need to be at the airport earlier, with less baggage, fewer liquids and no sharp things, to face longer queues and more officialdom (US immigration, anyone?).

"I don't like the intrusion of airport security," says Jennifer Cox. "I believe the full body scanner is just a dare to see how much humiliation we'll put up with. I refuse to go through them, insisting instead that staff frisk me: if someone is going to rummage around in my underwear, I want them to make eye contact with me as they do it."

But, aside from unwanted rummaging, has travel become a bit too comfy? Back in issue 1, Dervla Murphy gave a bleak prognosis: "Today's new generation of

travellers, the ones who cover too much ground, are missing out on a lot. There aren't too many who are really prepared to exert themselves either – they do like motor transport.

I think human beings

are going to mutate quite soon – they won't know how to walk in another couple of centuries!"

Hilary Bradt, founder of Bradt Travel Guides – which will be celebrating its own 40th anniversary in 2014 – agrees. "Travel is far less adventurous than when Lyn and Paul and I were doing our serious travelling. In the developing world it was not practical to book accommodation in advance, nor did we make any attempt to keep in touch with our nearest and dearest. It was literally a step into the unknown, and I think we all loved that."

In 2013 we can fly almost anywhere and find a local guide in Nowhereston with the click of a mouse. We use fewer guidebooks and more apps. We pack technical kit and gadgets along with our sarongs and our dental floss (still the best way to emergency-mend a rucksack). But do we feel differently about travel? "No, I don't," says Simon Calder, "but I'm possibly a bit better at it."

That's what we like to think about *Wanderlust* too – same feeling, same passion, just a bit better.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

It might be our anniversary, but we're giving YOU the present. After all, if it wasn't for you, our loyal readers, we wouldn't have anything to celebrate. So, with this issue, every one of our UK readers will receive a **£10 Rohan gift card** (www.rohan.co.uk), to spend in store on super travel gear.

Great choices include Rohan's temperature regulating, high-wicking, body-odour resistant Superfine Merino 200 Zip baselayer (*below right*) or the insulating Nightfall Jacket (*below left*) – hardwearing but light, making it perfect for town or freezing hiking weather.

We're also offering a **Wanderlust 20 canvas bag** with some copies so you can carry us everywhere! Subscribers can call the Wanderlust office to request one. Thanks to you all!



WIN! WANDERLUST ISSUE 1



Copies of *Wanderlust* issue 1 are about as rare as a Ryanair refund. But we've found a few precious copies in the back of the store room. To win one of ten signed copies, enter our competition online at www.wanderlust.co.uk





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Matt Gannan: CEO & Adventure Traveller

“Happy Birthday to our friends at Wanderlust! The last twenty years have seen a wonderful partnership develop between Tucan Travel and Wanderlust built on a shared passion for adventure travel.

We are delighted to have had the opportunity to watch Wanderlust grow from a spare bedroom business to the wonderful, inspiring publication that it is today, as we ourselves have grown, expanding to new and up and coming destinations every year.

Like Tucan Travel, Wanderlust is still independently owned meaning that the original values, ideas and passion that led to the formation of the publication are still very much alive today. From all the team here at Tucan Travel, we wish everyone at Wanderlust a very Happy 20th Birthday. I am sure the next 20 years will be as successful.



£50 off for subscribers

Ramblers Worldwide Holidays are also offering £50 off for *Wanderlust* subscribers as well as early bird discounts. See ramblersholidays.co.uk for more info

WIN a £1,700 walking holiday in Andalucia with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays

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Ramblers Worldwide Holidays is offering a reader and a friend the chance to win an *Andalucian Walking Holiday*.

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Q: How many countries does RWH offer walking holiday adventures to apart from Andalucia?

- a) 30
- b) 50
- c) 70+

To enter (and full terms and conditions) see www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer and contact info to the *Wanderlust* address (p2) marked 'RWH'. Closing date is 1 January 2014. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.

For more information go to www.ramblersholidays.co.uk or call 01707 386690

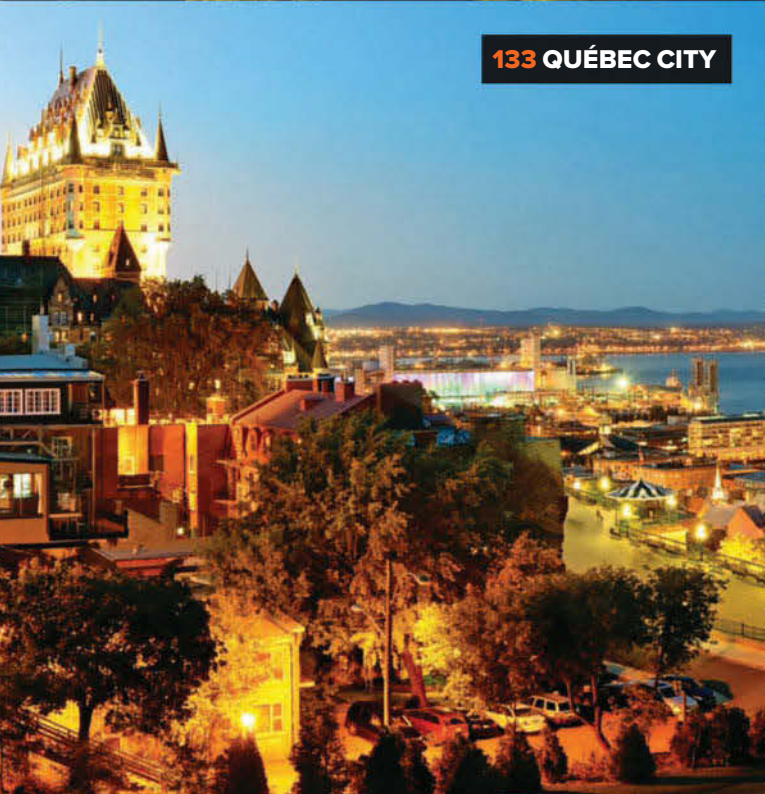
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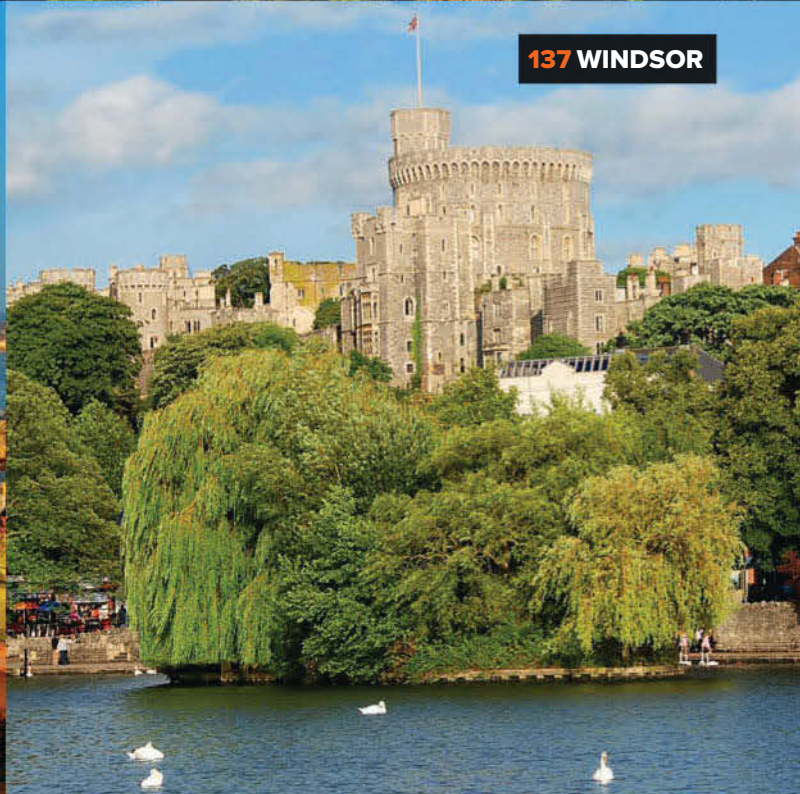
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137 WINDSOR



WIN a trip to the Slovenian Alps worth over £2,000 with Headwater

Enjoying an active adventure doesn't mean giving up life's luxuries, as you and a friend could soon discover thanks to Headwater...

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Unfurling like a giant green picnic blanket, the countryside here is perfect for exploring on foot. At its heart lies Triglav National Park, which extends grandly along the Austrian and Italian border. Named after its highest peak, Mount Triglav, the park encompasses almost all of the eastern Julian Alps, and it's in these emerald valleys and traditional lodges that your Headwater adventure takes place.

Breathe in the Alpine air in the village of Kranjska Gora, surrounded by wooded mountains or view this amphitheatre of jagged peaks reflected on the surface of Lake Bohinj. From there you can cross the mighty Vršč Pass into the deep greens of Trenta Valley, following the Soča River. With the scent of Triglav roses hanging in the air, you'll discover waterfalls, meadows and dramatic peaks, as well as the mountain-side Kluze fortress in Bovec, where the panoramas are ripe for a picnic.

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So don't let diminutive Slovenia fool you, it's loaded with big adventure and thanks to Headwater you can explore it in comfort.

How to enter

One lucky reader and a friend will win a place on Headwater's *Slovenian Alps Adventure*, an eight-night self-guided trip for two through Triglav National Park, including flights and accommodation. To enter, just answer this simple question:

Q How tall is Mount Triglav?

- a) 2,864m
- b) 3,856m
- c) 1,023m

To enter (and for full terms & conditions), go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/ competitions or send your answer, name and contact info to the usual *Wanderlust* address (p2) marked 'Headwater'. Travel & accommodation are subject to availability. Closing date for entries is 1 January 2014. Please state 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.

To find out more check out www.headwater.com or call on 0845 485 3047

headwater
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Québec City, Canada

The point where Europe and North America collide, take in Québec City's historic streets and eats, then explore the province beyond, advises **Phoebe Smith**

i Before you arrive

Given that it's perched on top of a cliff, surrounded by ancient fortified walls and guarded by a working citadel, it's no surprise to learn that Québec City has a somewhat embattled history.

Though the First Nations Algonquin discovered it first, the British and French subsequently fought over ownership of this prime settlement on the St Lawrence River for centuries. Claimed as New France in 1608, then for the British in 1759, it was tugged back and forth before eventually Québec was declared a Canadian province in 1840.

Québec City is now distinctly more Gallic (96% of its population speak French as their first language) and war is the last thing on anyone's mind – the locals are far too busy enjoying brunch and lattes in the many Parisian-style cafés that line the streets of the Old Town.

There is one battle that you will still face though – hilly Québec City is nicknamed 'the city of stairs' for very good reason, so bring your comfiest footwear.

✈ At the airport

Québec City Jean Lesage International Airport is about 16km south-west of the city centre. There are no direct flights to Québec City from the UK; the easiest route is to fly via Montréal, an easy connection. Total flight time from the UK is around 11 hours; returns cost from £540pp.

British citizens do not require a visa for stays of up to six months but will need to fill in an E311 Custom Declaration form (usually given out on the flight) and pass through immigration.

In Arrivals there is an information booth (help available 24 hours); there is also a currency exchange and several ATMs.

🚗 Getting into town

Taxis are readily available; the fixed rate for rides into the city centre is currently C\$34.25 (£21). If you're feeling flush limousines are also available for hire.

The Réseau du Transport de la Capitale (RTC; www.rtcquebec.ca) Bus 78 runs between the airport and Les Saules bus terminal, Monday-Friday; single fares cost C\$3 (£1.80).

🚆 Other ways to arrive

If you don't fly into Québec City, the fastest and most convenient way to get there from Montréal is to take the train, with several departures daily (www.viarail.ca). The journey takes from just over three hours; one-way fares start at around C\$34. Québec City's Gare du Palais train station is a ten-minute walk from the Old Town; there is a taxi rank outside. ►

HERE'S THE PLAN...

Essential Info

Population: 490,000

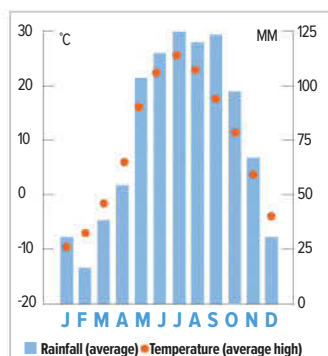
Language: Officially French/English bilingual, though French is more commonly spoken

Timezone: GMT-5 (Mar-Nov GMT-4)

International dialling code: +1

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Highest viewpoint: The best views are from the grassy banks above Avenue Saint-Denis, from where you can see the Château Frontenac and the St Lawrence River.



Health issues: None, but you will need to wrap up warm in winter as it can get very cold.

Recommended guidebooks:

Montréal & Québec City (Lonely Planet, 2012); *Top 10 Montréal & Québec City* (DK Eyewitness, 2012); *Montréal, including Québec City* (Rough Guides, 2007)

Web resources: Official guide to the city and surrounding area www.quebecregion.com; the official website to the province of Quebec www.bonjourquebec.com

App: The Québec app (available from www.quebecregion.com) is free, continuously updated and lists hotels, restaurants, activities and events – so all you need to keep you entertained on your visit.

Climate: Summers can be hot and humid (25°C and higher) while winters are cold and snowy (averaging around -5°C). Spring and autumn are more mild, though fairly short in comparison.

First Day's Tour

Start by heading down to the **Place du Marché du Vieux-Port** to grab a coffee and croissant, then sample some of the local maple syrup and produce.

Next aim for the city walls. At **Côte du Palais** you can climb up onto the ramparts and walk along the top, heading south – the perfect way to compare the New Town architecture to your right with the Old Town down on your left.

When you reach the gate at St Louis, take a photo of the impressive **Place de l'Assemblée Nationale** then leave the walls and head back into the Old Town (don't miss the cannonball stuck in the tree halfway down Rue St-Louis).

Pass the iconic **Château Frontenac** hotel before heading up the banks above Avenue Saint-Denis to take a photo. Next, take the many steps down to Marché-Champlain and enjoy lunch at **Le Cochon Dingue** (Crazy Pig; www.cochondingue.com).

Meander among the shops before taking the train back up to the top of the cliff.



Spend the afternoon visiting the **Notre Dame** cathedral, browsing the galleries in the artisan-filled streets opposite and listening to the street musicians.

For dinner, sample some *poutine* (a Québécois classic – fancy chips, cheese and gravy) in **Chez Aston**, the place where it was allegedly invented. End the day by riding the commuter ferry to Lévis to watch the sun set over Québec and the Château Frontenac light up against the darkening sky.

TOP TIP

If you like chocolate head to **Érico** (634, rue Saint-Jean; www.ericochocolatier.com) outside the old city walls, its a chocolate shop with a small free museum and the best ice-cream in town!



Where to Stay

Top end: Auberge Saint-Antoine (8, rue Saint-Antoine; www.saint-antoine.com – above) in the Old Port is a beautiful retreat that's part boutique hotel and part museum. Objects found when the original 17th-century building was renovated are presented throughout the hotel, which merges a period feel with modern touches. Doubles from C\$229 (£139) plus taxes.

Mid range: A striking mix of art deco and art nouveau, Hôtel Clarendon

(57, rue Sainte-Anne; www.hotelclarendon.com) is a block away from the Château Frontenac and ideal for exploring the charms of the Old Town. Doubles from C\$169 (£102) plus taxes.

Budget: Located in the heart of the Old Town, the HI-Québec Hostel (www.hihostels.ca) is a great budget option. There are dorms and private rooms; prices start from C\$22 (£13) pppn plus taxes.

Stay or Go

It's certainly worth staying for a long weekend to explore both the Old Town and the newer parts of the city beyond the walls. Then you'll want to head further afield.

A good start is **Montmorency Falls** (above), 12km north-east of the city. This vast cascade is actually higher than Niagara Falls, though not as wide. It's also surrounded by beautiful park and woodland, and you can follow a trail to a bridge above the falls, where the

Montmorency River drops into the St Lawrence. You can then continue on to the cliffside staircase that winds down to the falls' base; at the bottom, there's a cable car to take you back up to the start.

A little further out is the **Île d'Orléans**, famous for its local produce including honey, maple syrup and wine; tours and tastings are available. Further east still lays the **Charlevoix Valley**, a great spot for hiking and whalewatching – see p100 for more.



Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, New Zealand

As winter bites in the northern hemisphere, head to South Island's majestic mountains as the park celebrates its 60 year anniversary...

Get orientated

Rising magnificently from deep within New Zealand's Southern Alps, the Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park is located at the centre of the South Island's humped glacial spine. Taking its name from 3,754m high Mount Cook (first ascended 120 years ago in 1914), the park contains 19 peaks over 3,000m, and covers a whopping 700 sq km. Around 40% is covered by glaciers, including New Zealand's longest, the 27km-long, 3km-wide Tasman Glacier.

Getting there

Air New Zealand (0800 028 4149, www.airnewzealand.co.uk) flies from London to Christchurch and Wellington from £984 return; flight time is around 30 hours with stopovers.

The easiest way to get to the national park, which is located off State Highway 80, is to hire a car; it's a four-hour drive west of Christchurch and a three-hour drive north of Queenstown.

InterCity Coachlines (www.intercity.co.nz) runs daily services from Christchurch and Queenstown to the park (from around NZ\$60 one way). Alternatively, catch a public bus to the towns of Twizel or Lake Tekapo; from there, Cook Connection (www.cookconnect.co.nz) runs shuttles to and from Mt Cook (Oct-May).

The visit

The Aoraki/Mount Cook Visitor Centre in Mount Cook Village (www.doc.govt.nz) has exhibitions as well as information on all the walks and activities available within the park.

The mountains are the main draw, but are not for the inexperienced or ill-prepared – conditions can change suddenly. Climbers must fill out a climber's intentions card at the visitor centre.

If you've no head for heights, but still want to enjoy the rugged landscape, follow one of the walking tracks around the visitor centre or choose a gentle forest trail; look out for the Mount Cook lily, the world's largest buttercup.

If you feel like getting a better overview, take a scenic flight from Mount Cook airstrip; trips soar above the park and also land on glaciers.

Snow sports enthusiasts should visit June-October. Skiers and snowboarders of all abilities are catered for – there are four snowfields, as well as the chance to tackle routes down the Tasman Glacier. ►

◆ A Mountain Legend

Aoraki/Mount Cook is New Zealand's highest mountain, and is sacred to the Ngai Tahu tribe. Legend has it that the mountain and its companion peaks were formed when a boy named Aoraki and his three brothers came down from the heavens to visit Papatuanuku (Earth Mother) in a canoe. The canoe flipped and the brothers climbed onto the overturned boat; eventually the wind turned them to stone. The canoe became South Island; Aoraki, the tallest brother, became Mount Cook; the rest became the Southern Alps.



◆ Aoraki/Mount Cook

A premier mountaineering destination, Aoraki/Mount Cook was first climbed in 1894 by New Zealanders Tom Fyfe, George Graham and Jack Clarke.

◆ The Hermitage

First built in 1884, but rebuilt and expanded over the years, The Hermitage is a major hotel in the park.



■ Essentials

Language: English

Time: GMT+12

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: NZ dollar (NZ\$), currently around NZ\$1.9 to the UK£

Health: Excellent facilities. Beware changing weather and strong sun.

This feature is adapted from the DK Eyewitness New Zealand guide (£15.99), the best visual guide to the country. www.traveldk.com

◆ Murchison Glacier

Along with the Mueller, Hooker, Tasman and Godley glaciers, this dominates the valley pattern in the park.



◆ Flightseeing

Scenic flights operate from Glentanner Park Centre and Mount Cook airstrip. There are a range of trips over the park; many include landing on a glacier.



◆ Tasman Saddle Hut

One of the many alpine huts and shelters within the park for the use of trampers and climbers.

◆ Tasman Glacier

The largest in New Zealand, this glacier is 27km long and up to 3km wide. Heli-skiing is a popular way to experience it.



◆ Giant Buttercups

The Mount Cook lily is one of the beautiful alpine plants found within the park.



◆ Walks from Mount Cook Village

There are several good, well-signposted walking tracks in the vicinity of Mount Cook Village. They are suitable for people who do not have any climbing experience.

Kea Point and Governors Bush are short walks that focus on the park's vegetation and birdlife. Longer walks include the Sealy Tarns, Hooker Valley and Red Tarns tracks. Although these tracks are well marked, the ground is rough in places and it is advisable to wear stout shoes or boots and to carry a walking stick. A warm sweater or jacket is needed for places exposed to the wind, even during summer.

Brochures on the walks, with descriptions and walking times, are available at the visitor centre in the village.





Windsor, Great Britain

Castle gazing, park walking and river roaming – Wanderlust’s hometown of Windsor is a princely place for a weekend as **Natalie Mortimer** discovers

Like the Queen herself, Windsor oozes pageantry but has also embraced modern Britain. The riverside town is a mix of designer shops and sprawling deer-grazed parkland, where history lurks around many a cobbled corner then whacks you full in the face in the form of the chilly grey walls and turreted towers of Windsor Castle.

A fort and royal residence has dominated this spot since 1070, when William the Conqueror chose the site for its advantageous position: a day’s march from the Tower of London; right by the Thames; commanding views of the western approach to the capital. Windsor Castle has been continuously inhabited ever since, and extended and refurbished by almost every subsequent sovereign. This makes it the largest and oldest occupied castle in the world.

Originally built as a fort, the first monarch to use it as a house was Henry I in 1110; his

grandson, Henry II converted it into a palace. In 1215, King John rode out from Windsor to sign the Magna Carta at nearby Runnymede. In 1642, Oliver Cromwell used it as a prison; during the Restoration, Charles II made it more magnificent than ever, adding a new set of State Apartments. When Queen Victoria made the castle her official residence, Windsor became the centre of the British Empire. Having survived the Second World War and a terrible fire in 1992, the castle remains the town’s crowning glory.

There is, however, more to Windsor than its imposing stronghold. Full of quirkiness – the only blue postbox in Britain; 16m-long Queen Charlotte Street, the country’s shortest – Windsor has a thriving centre. Extremely walkable, most of the town’s attractions are a short amble from the castle.

Pedestrianised Peascod Street is the main shopping thoroughfare. Nearby, Windsor Royal Shopping arcade occupies the grand Victorian

Railway Station, where a purse-destroying gamut of high-end outlets sit amid original 1850s features. The bulk of the tourist bustle centres on High Street, which sweeps down past the castle in a tumble of pubs and restaurants towards the River Thames.

Follow High Street all the way to the footbridge, cross the Thames and you’re in Windsor’s sister-settlement, Eton. Separated by the river, they’re essentially two towns in one, and have had close ties since Henry VI founded Eton College in 1440. Now an enclave of little boutiques, peppered with teenage boys in billowing gowns, Eton’s own quaint High Street feels like a natural extension of its larger neighbour.

To escape most of the seven million tourists that pour into Windsor and Eton annually, head into Windsor Great Park. Once a vast Norman hunting forest, this 20 sq km green-space is now a mix of formal avenues, woods and open grassland grazed by herds of deer. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: Year round. September–March for access to Windsor Castle's Semi-State Rooms.

Getting there: Windsor is 1.6km from Junction 6 of the M4. There are two railway stations, Windsor & Eton Central and Windsor & Eton Riverside; both connect to London. Heathrow is 20km east; bus routes 71 and 77 link Windsor and Terminal 5 (www.heathrow7series.com).

Getting around: The compact centre is best explored on foot. Buses serve the wider area; an Explorer FirstDay ticket offers unlimited travel for 24 hours for £8 (www.firstgroup.com).

Where to stay: The Macdonald Windsor Hotel (23 High St; 01753 483100, macdonaldhotels.co.uk) offers opulence right opposite the castle; doubles from £130pn. For a more boutique option, Frances Lodge B&B (53 Frances Rd; 01753 832019, franceslodge.co.uk) is central, with ten contemporary rooms; doubles from £85pn.

Where to eat: There's an overwhelming choice of chain restaurants and independent eateries around Windsor



and Eton. For elegant candle-lit dining, Gilbey's (gilbeygroup.com) is a cut above, while family-run Al Fassia (alfassiarestaurant.com) remains one of the UK's best Moroccan establishments.

About 8km west sits the small village of Bray, home to a superfluity of Michelin-starred marvels, including Heston Blumenthal's The Fat Duck (thefatduck.co.uk) and Alain Roux's Waterside Inn (waterside-inn.co.uk).

Further info: www.windsor.gov.uk

Day 1 ABSORB THE HISTORY

Start early, and head straight for Her Majesty's weekend home (the Royal Standard will be flying if she's in residence). **Windsor Castle's** walls guard the glorious State Apartments, the Drawings Gallery, Queen Mary's Dolls House and St George's Chapel; in winter, the five Semi-State Rooms are also open. Admission includes a guided tour of the Precinct and an audio tour (£17.75; royalcollection.org.uk). The best views over the surrounding countryside are from the north terrace.

A visit to the castle takes two to three hours. Keep an eye on the time if you want to catch the **Changing the Guard** (11am Mon–Sat, April–July; alternate days the rest of the year).

Next door to the castle is the elegant, Grade I-listed **Guildhall**. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren in 1690, it has hosted the marriage of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles. It's also home to the Windsor & Royal Borough Museum (£2).

From the Guildhall, head back past the castle gates



and Queen Vic's statue to follow the road down to the Thames. Cross the footbridge into **Eton** to visit the prestigious college, where 19 prime ministers and many young royals have studied. Guided tours run on certain dates, Mar–Oct (www.etoncollege.com).

Cross back over the bridge to finish with a meal at **Bel & The Dragon** (belandthedragon-windsor.co.uk), which has been an inn since the 11th century.

TOP TIP

The splendid – and occasionally notorious – grounds of Cliveden is a short journey from Windsor. The walkable grounds are now owned by the National Trust (£5.45 entry), the mansion itself now a posh hotel.



Day 2 TAKE A STROLL

Today, explore some of the countryside surrounding Windsor. There are plenty of possible walks but this 15km loop combines pretty villages and parkland. Start in **Home Park** (off Romney Lock Road), which runs alongside the Thames. Part of the Crown Estate, the park is Windsor's main sports field; it's also home to the annual Royal Horse Show (rwhs.co.uk).

Walk around the perimeter of the park to enter **Datchet**; in Tudor and Stuart times this village was home to royal courtiers and rich London merchants. Follow the Thames, which snakes south, crossing it at Southlea Road. Continue into **Old Windsor**, the oldest Saxon Town in Berkshire and the seat of Edward the Confessor.

Walk through the town and follow the road to Bishop's Gate Road, which leads to the Bishop's Gate entrance to **Old Windsor Wood**. Head west to the Copper Horse, a statue of George III on horseback, commissioned by his son George IV.

The statue marks the southern end of the **Long Walk**; stroll down this 4.26km avenue, which unrolls like a (thigh-achingly long) red carpet to the George IV entrance of **Windsor Castle**, often passing herds of velvet-antlered deer en route.

Finish by resting your feet at the **Two Brewers** (Park St; www.twobrewerswindsor.co.uk), a cosy 17th-century pub just by the castle gates. Try the crab cakes!

Day 3 MESS ABOUT ON THE RIVER

You could easily spend day three outside of Royal Berkshire: Windsor is well placed for exploring some of England's most exciting cities – London is only 30 minutes away by train, Oxford just under an hour. However, there's still plenty more regal countryside and important British history to be discovered.

To see where King John sealed the Magna Carta – one of the most important documents in English history – head to the rolling hills and graceful meadows of nearby **Runnymede**. A Magna Carta Memorial stands at the foot of Cooper's Hill. Other monuments dot the area: visit the Kennedy and Air Forces Memorials too (www.nationaltrust.org.uk).

A stone's throw across the river sits the 2,000-year-old Ankerwycke yew tree and the ruins of a 12th century Benedictine priory.

For a gentle Thames trip, French Brothers (www.frenchbrothers.co.uk; pictured) offers a variety of **cruises**, including a 40-minute Windsor round-trip (£5.70; year round) and a four-hour one-way sail from Runnymede to Hampton Court (£13.30; Jun–Sept).

If you'd rather stay on firm ground, take to the 294km **Thames Path** (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thamespath), which runs through Windsor; for example, you could walk from Windsor to Maidenhead (13km), then catch the train back. 📌



travel counsellors



My Story Helena Grimes, **Travel Counsellor**

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Travel Company Tales



Mountain Kingdoms

Steve Berry

Managing Director of
Mountain Kingdoms

How did Mountain Kingdoms get started?

I had the idea since writing a thesis on adventure travel in my youth. Then every time I came back from a major Himalayan expedition I wanted to set up an adventure company, but it all came together in 1986 after my attempted climb of Mt Gangkar Punsum. This is Bhutan's highest peak and the highest unclimbed peak in the world today. The whole experience gave us something that other British companies were not able to offer: access to the Bhutanese Himalayan treks and tours, and the best contacts inside Bhutan.

What were the early challenges?

Some friends rented me an office in the attic of a Georgian building in Bristol. It was five floors up and we had a notice on the door that said, "If you have made it this far you are fit enough to go on a trek to the Himalaya." When the weather was nice we used to work on the

roof. There were two full-time partners and a part-time secretary. We broke even in our first year and never looked back! The challenge in that first year was clinging on to every booking that came our way. That includes a booking from my future wife, who still insists I owe her the cost of her first two holidays with us!

What makes MK unique?

I could spout all sorts of marketing spiel at this point, but honestly I think it is our logo that is unique. Our 'Thunder Dragon' is the same dragon that is on the Bhutanese national flag, and this dragon, carrying the jewels of Buddhism in its claws, appears in monastery paintings across the Himalaya. It's endowed with extraordinary powers. I believe Mountain Kingdoms also has a certain mystique – perhaps a part of it comes from our powerful logo but more probably from the depth of our travel experience as a company.

Future plans?

In 2014 we are offering a rare trek to Mt Gangkar Punsum, the place where Mountain Kingdoms really began. This super-remote trek resonates with the recent publication of Cicerone's guide, *Trekking in the Himalaya*. I wrote three chapters and the guide is edited by Mountain Kingdoms trek leader Kev Reynolds. I will lead the trek, retracing much of the original route I took in 1986. A fitting homecoming for me and Mountain Kingdoms!

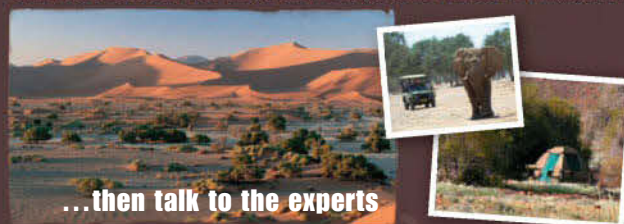
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■ Their view

TALKING HEADS

We asked *Wanderlust's* travel luminaries which experience had changed their life, here's what they had to say...



Simon Reeve

A young Somali woman helped me to recognise travel as an awesome privilege. While tracking the Equator for a TV series, I dropped out of the sky

to meet Fatimah and a thousand others in a refugee camp on the Kenyan/Somali border. It was a positive camp run by caring aid workers. But it was also a forgotten prison. Fatimah was 23, and had been there for most of her life. She was literate, well educated and bursting with capability and promise. While an accident of birth and my British passport allowed me to travel the world, for nearly two decades, Fatimah had been forbidden from travelling more than a few kilometres from the camp. The memory of her haunts me.



Hilary Bradt

I think it would be in Chile in 1974, just after the coup that toppled President Allende. We crossed the border from Argentina in some trepidation.

As committed *Guardian* readers we knew what to expect: despair and suffering. But as we walked through Santiago we were stopped more than once by Chileans anxious to tell us their side of the story – about food shortages and corruption that had preceded the coup. “Tell the people in your country that we are glad that Allende has gone!” What we learned is that the media only reports one side of a story, and that travel enables you to listen to both sides and to hear what the people who live in the country have to say. The experience in Chile hasn't changed my politics, but it's made me much more open-minded. Life changing indeed.

Michael Palin

There was one voyage that changed the way I looked at the world. And it was a voyage, in the good old-fashioned sense of the word. From Dubai to Bombay on a dhow boat, for *Around The World In Eighty Days*. It was in 1988, a time before sat nav and cell phones. As we made our way down the Gulf, through the Straits of Hormuz, and out across the Arabian Sea, we were entirely dependent on our crew of 16 Gujaratis. All our sophisticated technology was useless compared to their navigational skills handed down over hundreds of years. Only one of the crew spoke any English, but over seven days and nights, despite all the differences in culture, background and circumstances, we struck up a rapport which blossomed into a series of most unexpected friendships.

What I learnt from my voyage aboard the *Al Sharma*, is that sharing is a basic human instinct. That, when all is stripped away, the divisions and distinctions that are often used to keep us apart seem ridiculously unimportant.

I was a different person after that journey. My guard was down, my fear of the unknown had begun to evaporate. By the time the dhow reached Bombay I had lost that sense of Them and Us. From then on, if my travels were to mean anything, they had to be about Us. All in it together.



‘When all is stripped away, the divisions and distinctions that are often used to keep us apart seem ridiculously unimportant’



Mark Carwardine

I'll never forget the first time I saw a whale. I was 21 years old and on a whalewatching trip off the coast of California. We hadn't seen anything for nearly two hours when, suddenly, a grey whale breached next to the boat, right in front of me. I still remember having an epiphany, as it flew through the air, that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with whales. I feel incredibly lucky, because that's pretty much what I've done.



Jonathan Scott

The Marsh lions of the Mara have been the focus of our family's world since I first started watching them in early 1977. I can still remember being introduced to the pride by my mentor Joseph Rotich, or *Bwana Chui* as he was known to all the drivers and guides in the Mara, meaning ‘Mr Leopard!’ Joseph showed me how to look

for predators, how to read the signs and listen to the call of the wild.

During that first game drive, Joseph took me to Musiara Marsh to search for lions and he soon spotted two huge pride males standing tall along the edge of the riverine forest, their golden manes blowing in the wind. In that moment, my dream of living with wildlife in the heart of Africa became a reality and [my wife] Angie and I continue to follow the Marsh lions to this day.

Angie and I met through our love of wildlife and photography: it was the Mara that shaped our meeting. We were married atop the Siria escarpment, 300m above the animal speckled plains within view of the Marsh pride's territory in 1992. We are at our happiest when in the presence of these great predators lying among the shade of the rapidly retreating forest at the heart of the Marsh or nursing their young along the intermittent watercourse known as *Bila Shaka*. Bila Shaka means ‘without fail or always there’, testimony to how easy it is to find lions in the area. 📷

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